

CHAPTER 11

WISE PEOPLE SEEK TO BECOME EXCELLENT AND FAITHFUL WORKERS

*Do you see a man skilful in his work?
he will stand before kings;
he will not stand before obscure men.
Proverbs 22:29 (RSV)*

*Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread,
but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.
Proverbs 28:19 (ESV)*

*Like an archer who wounds everyone
is one who hires a passing fool or drunkard.
Proverbs 26:10 (ESV)*

*Know well the condition of your flocks,
and give attention to your herds,
Proverbs 27:23 (ESV)*

*The hand of the diligent will rule,
while the slothful will be put to forced labor.
Proverbs 12:24 (ESV)*

*“Do not love sleep, lest you become poor.....
Proverbs 20:13(a) (NASB)*

Most people hugely underestimate the importance of their job in God’s eyes and the part it plays in their growth as a disciple

In 36 years as a Christian I have never heard a single sermon on work, or on the role our job plays in both revealing and developing the quality of our character. Neither have I ever heard any leader say how important our job is to God. Doesn’t that strike you as odd, given that we spend one third of our lives working, which is actually half of our waking hours, because eight are spent in sleep? You might imagine it would be obvious that our job is vitally important, and that God really cares about how hard we work, how faithful we are to customers and colleagues, and whether we honour our bosses.

Yet, somehow, none of this is ever spoken about at all, let alone focused upon. One reason for it being so widely ignored is that most church leaders have either never had a normal secular job at all, or it was many years ago. Therefore, they don’t feel confident in teaching about work, the workplace, client care, or handling colleagues and bosses. Another reason is the widely held view that Christianity is about what you do in church meetings, not what you do the rest of the week, least of all at the workplace.

Few would ever say that explicitly, but it is deeply embedded in many people’s minds. However, that is not how God sees it. Our job is of vital importance to Him. It is one of the ways, if not the main way, that He exposes us to different types of people, experiences, challenges and pressures, to help us to grow in character and maturity as disciples. Sadly, my subjective opinion of the *average* worker, at least in the UK, is that they are not faithful or committed. They have only a limited work ethic, little understanding of the concept of service, and are resentful of, and even hostile to, their bosses.

One sees and hears their negativity as they express their dissatisfaction and unhappiness about their job and how they dislike their own boss, and bosses in general. I saw a Facebook post in which the writer

was scathing about bosses. It was oozing with contempt and also spoke as if all bosses are tyrants, not just some, and as if all employees are abused and downtrodden. I responded to suggest that if each worker was to examine himself, improve his own standards, and identify the faults in himself, instead of complaining about his boss, then he may well end up becoming the boss himself.

The person thought my comment was ridiculous, as if it was obvious that only bosses have faults, never employees. Someone might ask what the harm is in having an embittered attitude towards bosses, even if it isn't justified. The answer is that it undermines your performance as an employee and prevents you from being the kind of worker that God wants you to be. It also spills over into every other part of your life as well. Therefore, even if some of your grievances are well founded, it is still harmful for you if you become sour as a result of holding on to them.

A far better response, even if you truly do have a bad boss, is to look for another job. But, in the meantime, make sure that you provide excellent and faithful service while you are in your current job. That will not only please God, it will also benefit you and help you to grow in self-control, endurance and maturity. That said, I have learned from experience, and from my own mistakes as I now look back, that one should be very slow to conclude that one has a 'bad boss'. It is possible that you do, but it is at least equally possible, if not more likely, that some or all of the fault is yours, not his.

I can think of some stern sergeants and inspectors who put me through my paces when I was young. They returned my paperwork to me for amendment, sometimes repeatedly, and told me off for my errors. However, as I now reflect on those men, with the benefit of over 30 years of experience, and having been a supervisor, boss and employer myself, I see them differently. If my 21 year old former self was to come and work for me today I would have a few salty things to say to him myself that he may not like. In fact, I would probably correct him more robustly than my old bosses corrected me.

Do not assume, automatically, that you are in the right and that any criticism of you is unfounded

We therefore need to guard against complacency, self-righteousness and the automatic assumption of being in the right. Those attitudes come so naturally to us. Very few people, when faced with a boss who is criticising or correcting them, will think to themselves: *"I need to improve and stop causing problems for my boss, such that he is not put to further inconvenience, or financial loss, and no longer has the unpleasant task of having to correct me."* A more common response, however, would be something along these lines: *"Who does he think he is to tell me off and to find fault with my work for no reason?"*

Therefore, if you want to become an excellent worker, which we all ought to want, but very few of us actually do want, one of the first steps is to stop resenting your employer. Force yourself to begin to value and appreciate him, whatever his deficiencies may be, or seem to be. If you feel he has some faults, or is making wrong decisions, the chances are you don't fully or properly understand all the facts. If you knew everything that he knows about what is really going on, his actions and decisions would probably make a lot more sense and you would no longer view them in the same way.

Therefore, when a manager does something which makes no sense to you, or even seems unfair, don't leap to the conclusion that they are acting wrongly. Very often a manager cannot reveal all the background facts or give the staff all the evidence they have. For one reason or another, the facts may have to be kept confidential, even where that silence causes the manager's actions to be misunderstood. Therefore, give bosses the benefit of the doubt. At least delay coming to a negative conclusion about them until you know a lot more about the situation and the wider facts.

Over the years I realised that one of the many tests God uses is to put us in positions of stress and difficulty in the workplace and to see how we react. He wants to see how we will treat customers, colleagues, and especially bosses, when we are under pressure, and whether we remain faithful and

respectful towards them. Of all these tests, perhaps the hardest is being required to give honour and loyalty to a boss who, *in your subjective opinion*, is not showing honour or loyalty *to you*.

I put the above words in italics because it is very difficult to be objective when you are in a stressful situation, or are being criticised. It is really hard to see yourself, and your own attitude and behaviour, as others do, and as they really are, rather than as you imagine them to be. We are all naturally self-centred, and even self-absorbed, as a result of our sinful flesh nature. Therefore, our automatic reflex reaction, unless we force ourselves not to do so, is to see ourselves as being in the right. We then justify ourselves in a millisecond, rejecting all blame, and resenting anyone who criticises us.

It is therefore seen as a given that anyone who is criticising us must obviously be:

- a) a horrible person
- b) hostile to us for no valid reason
- c) out to get us
- d) wrong in what he says, and even an idiot
- e) someone whom we should resent and defend ourselves from

Of course, it may be that someone who is criticising you really *is* some or all of those things. It would depend on all the facts. But those facts would first need to be carefully investigated and then reflected upon objectively, and with an open mind, not merely assumed. However, in the specific context of the workplace, the likelihood of a boss being a bad person who is out to get you for no good reason is low. At any rate, it is far less than the 100% certainty which most employees assume it to be when their performance or attitude is criticised.

A wise person, although tempted to justify himself when criticised, will try to overcome that tendency. He will force himself to stand back and weigh up the situation objectively and to assess *whether* he is in the right, rather than assume it automatically. He will also reflect open-mindedly on any criticisms, so as to weigh up whether there is any truth in them, and if so how much truth, and what he can learn from those remarks. Moreover, he will do this even if the comments were not made graciously by a kind, sensitive, tactful boss, but bluntly and rudely by an unkind, ungracious one.

The truth or otherwise of a criticism is not to be determined solely by the manner in which it was said, but by the intrinsic merit, or lack of merit, of the points being made. Sometimes, only a harsh, unkind, unfriendly person is willing to say blunt things to us. Our friends, and even the kinder, gentler bosses, will not do so. Therefore, the fact that the remark feels wounding, and is said by an unkind boss, who may even have intended it to be hurtful, does not, in and of itself, render the criticism invalid.

Of course, it may be invalid. It could be a lie, or a deliberate, unfounded, malicious attack on you. But the point is that no assumption should be made, *in any direction*, until you have forced yourself to weigh the criticism and to examine the evidence, both for and against, with ruthless objectivity. In this way a wise person can learn valuable lessons about his own weaknesses, bad attitudes and faults, *even from his enemies*. He can even do so from those who hate him and who are not seeking to help him at all, but only to knock him down.

Although such people often lie and exaggerate, they do not always do so. Sometimes even their words may contain a grain of truth, from which you can learn. You would probably never have received that lesson from your friends, or even from a kindly, supportive boss. That is why I eventually learned to give thanks even for unkind, harsh bosses, or senior colleagues, who have, in some ways, been unfair to me. God has used them to show me things about my own weaknesses and faults which nobody else would have been willing, or able, to show me.

Seek to learn lessons from every type of boss, good or bad, and to pass all of the tests that God sets for you

If you want to grow in maturity generally, and also in your skill, faithfulness and reliability as an employee, then recognise, and seek to pass, the various tests that God sets for you in the workplace. Realise *what* God is testing, and *why* He is testing it. Cooperate willingly as God uses bosses, colleagues and clients, plus the general demands and pressures of the workplace, to refine your character, increase your maturity, and expose and remove your faults. Once you begin to reflect upon it, God's approach and technique as your ultimate 'line manager' makes perfect sense.

If you lack resilience or endurance, what better way is there for God to address those faults than by putting you into a tough situation, or a dysfunctional team, or by giving you a strict boss, such that you are put under pressure? The demands which are made of you will expose your deficiencies and cause you to grow. It is obvious once you stop and think about it, but most of us never do stop and think about it. We have absorbed an image of God as a soft, cuddly figure who would never put us under any pressure and would always want us to be sheltered and to feel comfortable.

In fact, God is infinitely loving, and wants the very best for you, but He also wants you to grow as a disciple. That can't be achieved without exposing you to a long series of tests, pressures and stresses, which you would never willingly inflict upon yourself. God knows that you would always dodge such trials unless you were forced to face them. You might therefore be praying earnestly for Him to give you a 'better' boss, who will be 'nice' to you. But God may be thinking that what you actually need is an even stricter boss who will be firmer with you. Therefore, a wiser prayer would be:

"LORD, please give me the type of boss that I need, rather than the type that I would like to have. Then please let him continue to be my boss for as long as is necessary to enable me to change, to pass your tests, and to learn the things that I need to learn."

Whether or not you pray that sensible prayer, or choose instead to complain about your boss, the reality is that God will probably send you a number of strict, demanding, and even harsh bosses. He does it on purpose, not to punish you, but to refine you. He knows you need such bosses, whether you know it or not, and whether you ask Him for them or not. So, you are inevitably going to get such bosses, at least from time to time, regardless of whether you ask for them, or realise the vital role they play in your life, and even if you ask *not* to have them.

However, there is still a major advantage to be gained from asking God to send you a challenging boss who will require you to change. That sensible attitude, and willingness to cooperate, will make the refining and maturing process easier. It will also make it shorter than it would be if God had to impose it on you, against your wishes and contrary to your prayers. In other words, no matter how much you dislike it, God is determined to change you and to see you grow and mature.

Therefore, you might as well cooperate willingly, and even thankfully, with the inevitable, rather than keep up a futile fight against it. There may be pleasant seasons when God will let you have a kind, gracious, considerate boss, from whom you can learn how things *should* be done and how a business ought to be managed. You need to give thanks whenever you have such a boss, even if it is only for a while. They are useful role models for you, as well as being a privilege and a blessing while they last.

That said, few people ever do give thanks for good bosses, or even recognise them as being such. At least they don't tend to do so at the time, but only after they, or the boss, have moved on. Therefore, it is an even rarer person who is wise enough to give thanks to God for a strict, demanding, or even harsh boss, *while they are still working for them*. Yet we should give thanks for them because, if we can bring ourselves to listen willingly and fully cooperate, such bosses can do us a lot of good by:

- a) revealing, tackling and removing those faults in us which neither we, nor a gentle boss, would ever have dealt with

- b) at the very least, giving us a ‘reverse role model’, i.e. showing us how things should *not* be done, how a business should *not* be managed, and how other people should *not* be treated. Seeing such things demonstrated in practice, almost like a laboratory experiment, can be really useful and you can learn from their errors without having to make them yourself. Therefore, never under-estimate the value of those negative lessons. There have been many men whom God has used in my career to help me to see what I must *not be*, and how I must *not act*.

Some might ask if there is any point in addressing their own bad habits and faults if their current boss and colleagues have such a low opinion of them that they would not be willing to alter it, even if they were to change. You may feel that you have made such a bad start in a job, or given such a bad impression, that those around you will never alter their view of you. Even if that is so, seeking to change yourself is still worthwhile. Ultimately, you are not doing it for their sake, or to win their approval. It is for your own sake, so that you can become a success and be a better worker, and a better person, in future.

It may be that the only people who will ever think more highly of you will be your *future* employers and colleagues in your *next place of work*, after you have moved on. But for that to be so, you need to change *now*, in your *current job*, even while you are with people who may not be willing to re-assess their view of you, no matter how excellent you become. You have to be realistic about this. Remember also that your key objective is not to change the opinions of your current employers. It is primarily to change *yourself* and your own attitudes, habits and methods, regardless of whether anyone notices.

Your aim therefore must be to actually become an excellent employee, even if those with whom you currently work have a fixed view of you which they will never be willing to change. If you think in this way you can make good use of the next few months, or even a year or more, while you are addressing your faults and changing your attitudes and habits, *before you move elsewhere*. Then you will be better placed to be a success when you move on to your next job, where people won’t know you, and where you can build a new reputation.

If you were to move jobs immediately, before you have actually changed your ways, the next employer would be likely to form the same negative impression of you as your current one has formed. Then you will have lost the opportunity to make a genuinely fresh start there. Therefore never think that there is no point in changing. Also never hold back from the process of change, just because others cannot see your improvements, or won’t acknowledge them. To do so would make you the prisoner of other men’s opinions, which you must never allow yourself to be.

Let us now consider more closely the kind of faults, bad attitudes and bad habits which a great many workers have about their job, their clients or their boss, and which God wants a Christian to get rid of. I am probably in a position to give what the law calls ‘expert evidence’ on this subject as I have been in various jobs and businesses and at every level, from the bottom to the top, and every stage in between. That breadth of experience over three decades means I can see the issues and problems of the workplace from just about every angle.

There cannot be many situations that I have not faced, or types of worker, colleague, client or boss that I have not worked under or alongside, or whom I have not managed. It is rare for any Christian leader, writer or Bible teacher to have such breadth of perspective, because most have never had a secular job or run a business, or at least not for long. They usually go into so called “full time ministry” in their early to mid-twenties and never get to see any secular workplace from then on, if indeed they have ever seen one at all.

The nearest thing they have to a workplace from then on is the churches they serve in, or rather rule over, as is so often the case, and as I discuss in Book 8. I will now set out, and briefly explain, a non-exhaustive list of some of the main sins, faults, weaknesses and bad attitudes which a great many workers have. However, very few even recognise these faults in themselves, let alone seek to remedy or remove them. In my experience, the most common faults are as follows:

Fault 1 - Laziness

Most people assume that laziness is only one of the minor sins, at most, if indeed it is even a sin at all. However, that is absolutely not God's view. He has a lot to say about it. In fact, the Bible has more to say about laziness than about drunkenness, or many other things which most of us would assume to be more serious matters. Here are some examples:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.
2 Thessalonians 3:6 (RSV)

*A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich*
Proverbs 10:4 (ESV)

*In all toil there is profit,
but mere talk tends only to poverty.*
Proverbs 14:23 (ESV)

*The sluggard does not plow in the autumn;
he will seek at harvest and have nothing.*
Proverbs 20:4 (ESV)

³⁰ *I passed by the field of a sluggard,
by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,*
³¹ *and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;
the ground was covered with nettles,
and its stone wall was broken down.*
³² *Then I saw and considered it;
I looked and received instruction.*
³³ *A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,*
³⁴ *and poverty will come upon you like a robber,
and want like an armed man.*
Proverbs 24:30-34 (ESV)

*She looks well to the ways of her household,
and does not eat the bread of idleness.*
Proverbs 31:27 (RSV)

*Through sloth the roof sinks in,
and through indolence the house leaks.*
Ecclesiastes 10:18 (RSV)

Therefore, begin to examine yourself with rigorous objectivity and ask whether you are genuinely a hard worker who gives their full energy and attention to their work. Or, are you actually at some point along the 'laziness spectrum', such that you don't work wholeheartedly, with 100% effort and commitment, or at least not always? Don't be too quick to find yourself not guilty. Any genuine answer would require real self-examination, over a sustained period of time, not a quick, snap response.

However, even if you conclude that you are *less lazy* than your colleagues that does not mean that you aren't lazy. It just means, if indeed it is even true, that you may be less lazy than them. But that is nothing to be proud of. You might as well congratulate yourself for lying or stealing less often than they do. God doesn't merely want His people to be less lazy than unbelievers. He wants us not to be

lazy *at all*. So do employers. You therefore need to become a hard worker in absolute terms, not merely relative to those who are even lazier than you.

That said, if you are going to arrive at a correct assessment of your own work ethic, you will probably also need to change your definition of the word '*hard*'. In my experience, many people consider themselves to be a hard worker when, by my definition, or even by the standards of the average person, they are nothing of the sort. Therefore, some radical rethinking and redefining will be needed for most of us if we want to become genuinely hard-working in objective terms, and by the proper, biblical definition.

Fault 2 - Low standards and lack of attention to detail

Again, this is a fault which most people either don't know they have, or refuse to admit, or don't care about, even if they do admit it. I am referring to the fact that many workers do low quality work. They cut corners, miss things and don't bother to check for errors. They are too quick to say "*It will do,*" rather than do the job again, redraft a report, or double check a piece of work. God does not like that attitude. He wants you to be a diligent worker, with high quality standards, and to pay close attention to the condition of your 'flocks' or, in modern terms, your patients, customers or clients:

***Know well the condition of your flocks,
and give attention to your herds,
Proverbs 27:23 (ESV)***

One of the key tests of a worker is how well they do a task when they know nobody is watching and that nobody will ever check what they have done. For example, how well do they paint the back of a shed which they know nobody is ever going to see? Unless a person has that quality control mechanism solidly built into them as a value or habit, they will be satisfied with low standards. They will then do as poor a job as they are allowed to get away with.

They can only be made to work to an acceptable standard by putting supervisors in place to monitor their work and force them to do so. They have no inbuilt desire, within themselves, to ensure that their work is of a good standard. They do it only because they must, and *because someone is watching*, not because they *want to*, of their own free will.

But the truth is that there is always someone watching. God Himself sees every piece of work you ever do, even as you paint the back of a shed. Indeed, He watches such things closely and takes a keen interest. Therefore, always do your very best work, even if nobody is watching, and even if nobody will ever check it because, so far as God is concerned, you are doing it all for Him:

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:17 (ESV)

Don't just assume, as most do, that you are a good worker. Ask yourself honestly whether the quality of your work would be any better if a supervisor was nearby, or if you knew they would check your work later. If it would, then ask yourself why because, by rights, it should make no difference. You should appoint yourself as your own supervisor, insisting on the highest possible standards from yourself, regardless of whether anybody else will ever see, or find out, or punish you. Your objective should not be merely to avoid getting into trouble, but to do the best work that you can do, because:

- a) You are being paid a wage to do so.
- b) The customer has paid your employer for a proper service or product and is therefore entitled to it.

- c) You have a contractual duty to your employer to work to a high standard – whether or not he ever finds out.
- d) God is watching and checking *everything you ever say or do*. Moreover, He will one day reward or rebuke you for the way in which you did it. (See my Book 4 on The Judgment Seat of Christ)

None of those reasons are anything to do with your boss, or the customer, ever finding out that your work was of a poor standard and punishing you. Admittedly, that may happen, but your apprehension about that ought not to be necessary to motivate you to work properly. It is only needed because of the Fall, when Adam brought sin into the world. What Adam did on that terrible day made it necessary for employers ever since to check up on their workers and force them to maintain high standards, and to work in a trustworthy manner.

If you want to become a faithful disciple, then use the workplace to help you to grow. Aim to make it unnecessary for your employers to supervise you, at least in terms of making sure you work hard and pay attention to detail. It will always be necessary, even with an honest, hard-working employee, to give training and check for *errors* while they learn the *skills* needed to do the job. That is entirely different. It is no sin to make mistakes, or not to know things, or to have not yet developed the skills and experience we need. Even Jesus had to increase in wisdom and stature as He grew up:

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.
Luke 2:52 (ESV)

Fault 3 - Unfaithfulness to bosses, clients and colleagues

It is not only in terms of the quality of our work, or our attention to detail, that we need to be faithful. God also requires us to be faithful in every other way, to our employer, our colleagues and also the clients or customers whom we are ultimately serving. He wants us to show complete faithfulness right across the board, and to behave justly, fairly, loyally, decently and honestly at all times. Indeed, He wants us to be faithful always, and with everyone, whether we are at work or not.

Yet, the contract of employment, or '*master-servant relationship*', as it used to be called as recently as the 1970's, creates wider duties and higher expectations of faithfulness than those which apply generally. It therefore follows that higher standards are required of you at work than in everyday life because, in your contract, you have agreed to do many things which you are not obliged to do elsewhere. However, most of us give little or no thought to the implied 'duty of good faith' in our contracts. Therefore, genuinely faithful people are few and far between:

*Many a man proclaims his own loyalty,
 but a faithful man who can find?*
Proverbs 20:6 (RSV)

Some examples of faithful workers from the Bible are Barnabas and Silas who worked with Paul. Barnabas began as Paul's boss but, as Paul's stature grew, it became clear that God was raising Paul higher than him. Barnabas accepted that gracefully and humbly and became Paul's assistant instead. The way in which Luke writes of their exploits in the book of Acts reflects their change of roles. He begins by saying "*Barnabas and Saul*" but later says "*Saul and Barnabas*". Few men would be capable of working for someone who used to work for them. Their pride would not permit it.

Later there was a difference of opinion over whether to allow Mark to resume working for them after he had deserted them. Paul did not trust Mark after that and refused to have him back. But Barnabas still saw a potential future ministry in Mark and wanted to give him another chance. In the end he separated from Paul, who refused to work with Mark, and took Mark to work for him. It ended well

and Mark went on to be a major success. He was even given the honour of being allowed to write one of the gospels. That may never have happened if Barnabas had not remained faithful to Mark.

When that breach occurred, Paul chose Silas to be his main assistant, in place of Barnabas, and they went on to travel together from then on. In the book of Acts and the letters we see repeated references to Silas, who stays by Paul's side through all of the horrendous persecution that he later faces. Silas therefore ends up getting arrested with Paul in Acts 16:19, when they were dragged into the market place, beaten with rods and put in prison. Even so, Silas stayed with Paul and he did so again when they went to Thessalonica, where there was another riot by those who opposed Paul.

He then had to escape with Paul at night to flee to Berea, and then on to Athens, where they were, yet again, abused and rejected. Throughout many such harrowing experiences, virtually everywhere they ever went, Silas always stayed with Paul. He continued working for him, supporting him, and keeping him company, as Paul faced his many trials and afflictions. Would you have been willing to accept a job as Paul's assistant, given the awful working conditions and the continual suffering and persecution it involved?

More to the point, would you have been willing to *stay in the job* and not resign and seek an easier position with an employer who is less unpopular? We know from how Mark and others deserted Paul that it was not an easy job, to put it mildly. Very few people were willing to do it, and especially to stick at it. I have a strong suspicion that, when the Millennial Kingdom begins, Silas may well be assigned a very high place, as a reward for his extraordinary faithfulness to Paul, and for all that he endured in order not to let him down.

Another example of faithfulness is Baruch, the assistant and secretary to the prophet Jeremiah, who was almost as unpopular as Paul and faced similar persecution and imprisonment as he carried out the tasks God gave him. Yet throughout it all, Baruch was constantly by his side, serving him, supporting him and sharing all the same dangers. But no letter of resignation was ever handed to Jeremiah by Baruch. He stayed faithful and even went to the Temple, at Jeremiah's request, (in Jeremiah chapter 36) and spoke there in Jeremiah's place.

He had to go because his boss had been banned from entering the Temple as he was so unpopular with the authorities. Reflect on the risk that Baruch was taking. He went to the Temple and read out Jeremiah's words publicly, "*in the hearing of all the people*" despite the obvious danger to himself, and also the unpleasantness of being insulted while doing so. That act of obedience took tremendous moral courage and loyalty, for which I am sure Baruch will be rewarded in the coming Kingdom. Even so, the Bible records it very briefly, with no fanfare. It simply says:

And Baruch the son of Neriah did all that Jeremiah the prophet ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the LORD in the LORD'S house.

Jeremiah 36:8 (ESV)

A fictional example of faithfulness to an employer is *Sam Gamgee*, Frodo Baggins' gardener in *The Lord of the Rings* by *JRR Tolkien*. My favourite character is not Frodo or Gandalf or Aragorn, or any of the other mighty figures. The one I most admire, and wish to emulate, is Sam Gamgee. He is the best example I can think of in literature of what it means to be an utterly faithful servant. Sam is completely devoted to Frodo and 100% committed to serving him and staying by his side, no matter what dangers Frodo faced.

He even goes with him into Mordor, when they faced what seemed to be certain death. At all times Sam put Frodo's needs first, giving him most of the food and water, keeping watch over him as he slept, and defending him from every danger. If you haven't seen the film or read the book I would urge you to do so. If you do, keep an eye on Sam. He is never the star of the show, but you will see in him a vivid illustration of what faithfulness is. Ask God to help you to become like that, but even more so, like Silas, Baruch and Barnabas, in your dealings with your own boss and the company you work for.

However, don't make the mistake of thinking that you only need to be faithful to those who are faithful to you, or only to the same extent as they are towards you. The degree to which other people are faithful to you, or whether they are kind or unkind, gracious or ungracious, polite or impolite, has no bearing on *how you must treat them*. Thus, even if your boss is rude, ungrateful, inconsiderate, and demanding, you must still remain faithful to him, whilst ever you continue to be employed. You cannot simply do back to him whatever he does to you.

That does *not* mean, however, that God expects you to carry on permanently working for your current employer. It may or may not be a good idea to move on to a new job, but you are free to do so, without that being in any way unfaithful. Your faithfulness has to continue *for as long as you work for that employer*, but there is no duty to stay indefinitely if they treat you badly. Indeed, even if you are treated well, I generally advise any ambitious person to move to a new job, or a new role with the same firm, every 2 – 3 years. That way you maximise the experience you get and that is not wrong.

There is a diminishing marginal return in terms of what you learn if you stay forever in the same company, especially if you keep doing the very same job. Every time you get a new role, or change your employer, there will, for a time, be a steep increase in the gradient of your 'learning curve'. Then it flattens out again after about two years. Therefore, by all means develop your career and strengthen and broaden your CV by moving around. Simply make sure that you are always utterly faithful to each employer *while you are still working for them*.

Fault 4 – Not truly caring about their work, or the fate of their client, patient or customer, to the point where it really matters to them

Most employees that I have worked alongside or supervised had only a moderate level of diligence. They did not truly *care* about what happened on their files or what the outcome would be for their client. They therefore found it far too easy, in my view, to go home at night without feeling any concern for the client's welfare, or whether they were doing enough for him, or taking the right steps. Such issues always troubled me deeply. I identified so closely with every client that it pained me to think of letting them down or failing to do all that I possibly could for them.

I really wanted them to win, or to get justice, and I was willing to go the extra mile, and indeed several extra miles beyond that, to get them the very best outcome. As a result, I did a lot of thinking in my own time, even while I was driving or bathing or walking the dog. By doing so, I regularly came up with ideas and solutions to problems which I would never have thought of if the client's case had not mattered so much to me. Whereas others found it easy to switch off and forget the client, I never could. I treated them all as if they were my relatives and was determined to do the very best I could for them.

I am not saying this to boast, but merely to try to explain what it means to *really care* about a client, patient or customer. That attitude is now so rare that many find it hard even to understand the concept, let alone do it. Even more would instantly, but wrongly, imagine that their own level of interest, and the care and attention they give, *are* deep and genuine, and of the kind that I advocate. But they would only think that because they set the bar far too low. Thus they are congratulating themselves when they should, instead, be aghast at their own lack of care.

A stark example of what I am speaking of arose when I went to visit a friend in hospital one Sunday evening. The hospital was already operating on a skeletal staff basis because it was the weekend. Thus there were few nurses on duty. Yet, during my visit, I saw seven of them gather to chat at the nurses' 'station' in the corridor by the edge of the ward. There was only one nurse on duty per section, so, as they chatted, they were neglecting seven whole sections, each of which had several seriously ill patients.

I watched with growing dismay as this wilful neglect continued and began to time it by my watch. That is how I know it went on for 45 minutes, during which not one of those nurses ever checked on, or attended to, *any* of their patients. In case you are wondering, this was not their dinner break. Their

breaks were staggered, precisely in order to avoid all the nurses being away from the patients at the same time. So, this entire episode took place *in work time*, while they were supposed to be *caring* for those patients.

I cannot imagine leaving my post of duty to chat with colleagues while leaving ill people unattended. One could only be capable of it if one's heart was callous and indifferent. That does not meet the definition of 'care' by anybody's standards, not just mine. The hearts of those seven nurses were cold and hard and I pity their patients. During those 45 minutes they could each have attended to their patients many times, if only to give them a cup of water or adjust their bedding. But they all did nothing.

Moreover, my friend, who had been in that ward for some days, said that what happened that evening was not unusual. The nurses regularly behaved in that way. It was part of the very culture of the hospital. In my own experience of visiting relatives in hospitals I have often seen similar examples of neglect, if not for so long a period at one time. However, even if that is the prevailing culture, and even if everybody else is neglecting their patients, that is still no reason for *you* to do so.

Your duty, in such a situation, if you were a nurse, would be to stay with your patients, to miss out on the impromptu group chat, and to get on with caring for the patients. That remains the case even if you are the only one doing so. In the past, when standards of care, and staff discipline, were higher in hospitals, it would also have been your duty to report that collective act of neglect to management. However, it would probably not be wise to report it today because the attitude, even of managers, has become so perverse.

Therefore, they would probably just punish you, for being a 'whistle blower', and take no action against the other nurses who neglected their patients. The reason is that in many workplaces, and especially the British NHS, the managers themselves don't care, or at least a large proportion of them. That is why so many NHS whistle blowers, instead of being thanked, are victimised and driven out. They draw attention to uncomfortable facts which those managers already know about, *but don't care about*, and which they prefer to cover up, rather than tackle.

Fault 5 - Dishonesty

In my Book 2 I have written a number of chapters on the issue of *truthfulness* which is one of the key character qualities we each need to develop if we are to grow as disciples. Please refer to those chapters for a much more detailed discussion of the subject of honesty and integrity in general. However, let's look briefly at this in the context of the workplace, where it is a major problem. In all sorts of ways, employees regularly lie to each other, their supervisors and bosses, their clients and customers, and even to themselves.

It is not only telling outright lies, but also general deviousness, manipulation, evasiveness, insincerity, dodging responsibility and being two-faced. We have all come across these things in others, because the reality is they are to be found in almost all of us. If you examine yourself with brutal frankness, you will probably admit that you are not always 100% honest in everything you say and do. Unless you have taken steps to increase your honesty, it is likely that you will still be lying, to one extent or another. For most of us it is only a question of degree.

My advice is to go on a radical programme of retraining, whereby you cut out absolutely *all* lying, cheating, deviousness, manipulation or two-faced-ness of any description. Resolve to be 100% honest, and sincere with everybody, at all times, and to develop a reputation for *absolute integrity*, such that everybody at work knows that you are completely unbendable, incorruptible and 'unbribeable'. Let them also see that your word is your bond, that what you say is exactly what you mean, and is always true.

However, don't just glibly tell yourself that that is already your position. Unless you are very unusual, it won't be, given how compromised and corrupt the general population now is, even amongst those

who claim to be Christians. Therefore, decide that you will seek *to become* one of those rare ‘Nathanael’ types who never lie and can always be trusted. In the short term cutting out lying will be difficult, and even costly. All sorts of dodges, excuses and devious schemes will no longer be available to you to get you out of tight corners.

However, in the long run, it will benefit you if you develop a reputation as a person of absolutely unbreakable truthfulness and integrity. That said, whether or not that approach ever benefits you is not the issue. The point is that it is right, and that total honesty is what God wants each of us to have. Given that *He* wants that, what need is there to consider whether *we* want it? It should be self-evident that that is the right approach, both at work and elsewhere, even if we gain nothing from it, and even if it is costly and painful.

Fault 6 - Unreliability

As a business owner who employed many staff over the years, one of my biggest headaches was that so few people can be relied upon to do what they are asked to do and to do it on time. There have only been a handful of staff upon whom I could completely rely. With them I could assign a task, project or responsibility and then relax and leave them to get on with it while I did other things. With most people, however, one simply cannot do that, or at least not safely. There is the distinct possibility that they will let you down in some way, or forget something, or not turn up, or somehow fail in their duty.

I think the main cause of this is that there is an insufficient seriousness about taking responsibility. Doing the task properly is simply not as important to most workers as it should be. However, if you want to be an excellent employee, who stands out from the others, then develop the character quality of reliability. Aim to become the kind of person who takes every task or duty really seriously and neglects nothing. Make diary entries and other careful arrangements to ensure that nothing is ever overlooked or mishandled.

Then other people can entrust things to you and completely relax, knowing that you won’t let them down and that they don’t need to constantly check up on you. The most reliable person I have ever known was my own Dad. If he agreed to do a thing he would always take it immensely seriously and take great care over it, even if it was the tiniest little task. I never saw him forget anything, or fail to turn up, or be late. He was totally dependable, and everybody knew that and that they could bank on it completely.

Therefore, start to retrain your mind to take all duties extremely seriously, however small they may be. The smallest details can spoil a project if they are overlooked or neglected. Also develop procedures to *supervise yourself*. If you do then, eventually, bosses will realise that they don’t need to supervise you themselves, as you are already doing it for them. For example, one habit which I developed early on in my career as a lawyer was to do a complete check of all my filing cabinets and my diary every Friday afternoon.

I checked every single file against my do-list to make sure no tasks were missing from the list. But if they somehow were, then I would add them to the do-list or, better still, do the task there and then. So, from about 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm I would trawl through all of my filing cabinets, my in-trays and my filing tray. I also examined my diary for the coming weeks to see what hearings, court directions, meetings, or other deadlines lay ahead. I had a dread of opening my diary on a Monday morning to find something I had forgotten about, and for which I had failed to prepare.

I chose to do this self-supervision exercise on Friday afternoons because I would be tired by then. It was therefore a good use of lower quality time, when I was not at my best in terms of energy. By doing this simple procedure I effectively became my own supervisor from an early age. That made the task of my bosses much easier, at least in that respect. I recommend that you do something similar, whatever

job you have. Scan the horizon for the days and weeks ahead and scrutinise each of your tasks, projects, cases, files or clients to see whether you have missed, forgotten or neglected anything.

In my own case I almost always found some things, whether small or large, that had somehow been overlooked during the week. This 'safety net' therefore saved me from many mishaps over the years. It is one of the reasons why, in my entire legal career, I never had any negligence claim made against me, or even against anybody who ever worked under me. Every year when I renewed our professional indemnity insurance policy, I got a certificate from the insurers which read "*No claims notified against this firm.*" That is exceptionally unusual, and I was always very proud of it.

Sadly, despite all my urging, most of my staff did not follow my example and try to become their own supervisor. A handful did, but they were the exception. Therefore, in recognition of the reality of human nature, and of most people's unreliability, I put in place a system whereby every file in the firm came to me to be checked at pre-arranged intervals. I would scrutinise each file myself and see what the file handler was doing and how well they were progressing. For some staff I needed to write detailed instructions about what to do next and also point out things which they should already have done.

For others, whose files were well handled, I could just write "*Well done. Press on.*" Nothing more was needed for the best staff. They gave me few problems. But some of the others were an ongoing headache. I soon came to know which category each person came into and our computer was set up to get files brought to me at widely differing intervals. For the least reliable staff it would be every 4 weeks, or even weekly on their worst files. But, for the more reliable staff, it would be 6 weekly, 8 weekly or even 13 weekly, because I could be more relaxed about them.

If I had a boss like me, using such a system, I would see it as a matter of professional pride to be one of the 13-week people, not one of the 4-week ones. I would also want to make sure that my supervisor would not need to say anything, or point out any errors or omissions, when they did see my files. Yet, most of my staff did not seem to have any such concerns and did not appear to mind being seen as being amongst the least reliable and least trusted members of staff. That would have made me feel utterly ashamed, but it did not seem to have that effect on them.

Fault 7 - Not seeing themselves as a servant and having no real understanding of the concept of service

Employment law used to be called '*the law of master and servant*'. That name was changed in the 1970's because of the growing unwillingness of the public to be referred to as 'servants' or to think of themselves as such. In the UK it is now seen as a degrading expression. But why should it be? If Jesus referred to Himself as "*one who serves,*" why should we feel demeaned by being spoken of, or spoken to, as a servant? It can only be demeaning if, due to your own pride, you think that serving others is beneath you. If so, then you are at fault and your attitude is wrong.

This is far more than just a matter of what words to use. The underlying heart attitude is the real problem. A person's pride causes them to want to be served rather than to serve, and certainly not to be spoken of, or treated, as a servant. As a result of this attitude adjustment over recent decades, it is now very difficult to get really good service anywhere. When you do get it, it is a delight, but the problem is it is so rare. Employees in all sorts of businesses, and at all levels, simply do not see themselves as servants. They do not even have any real understanding of the very concept of 'service'.

I tried to drill the concept of service into my staff, but I was largely fighting a losing battle as the attitude I was seeking to build in to them is now so profoundly alien to UK culture. It did not fit with their view of themselves or others. The analogy I used was to say that their 'astronomy' was wrong. That is they saw themselves as the 'Sun', at the centre of the solar system, and all the other people in their lives, whether clients, colleagues or bosses, as being in orbit around them. Instead, we must always see the customer, client or patient as being the Sun, with ourselves orbiting around them.

That distinction may sound pedantic, but it has major implications and taking that approach actually changes everything. Any employee, or indeed any person in any context, who sees themselves as being at the centre of their own universe will never be a success. In particular, they will never develop the mind-set or heart-attitude of a servant, which God wants each of us to have. It is also, by the way, what every client, patient or customer wants us to have if we are dealing with them.

However, it is very rarely what they get, at least not in any genuine way, because so few of us are even *willing* to serve others, let alone *eager* to do so. The desire of the average worker is simply to make a living and to do so with the minimum of stress, hassle and hard work for himself. Those are most people's key objectives and they tower above the needs of the client, customer or patient. If those things ever come into conflict, the average worker's own self-interest will come first every time, without any need to think it over.

Fault 8 - Reluctance to endure any difficulty, hardship or pressure at work and seeking excessively to avoid these, irrespective of the effect on others

The average employee does not see it as any part of his role to face difficulty, hardship or pressure. They will go to great lengths to avoid or postpone these, so as to make life easier for themselves, without any thought for what the consequences might be for their clients, colleagues or employer. It is seen as self-evidently right for them to do all they can to make their own job easier for themselves. The impact on others is either not considered at all, or it is seen as being obviously less important than looking after number one.

So, if someone comes to them with a request for help, or advice, or service, their first thought will be of what that request might mean *for their own workload*, or even whether they feel *in the mood* for doing such a task. Then they will fob that person off or say it can't be done, or isn't needed, or that they have come to the wrong place and need to ask someone else etc. People who operate in this way either see it as their right to do so, or they don't care whether it is justified or not, as they fully intend to do it regardless.

Their approach is based on a wrong set of assumptions and attitudes. The employee puts himself and his own needs and wants at the centre and makes them primary such that they take precedence over every other person, duty or consideration. Therefore, few employees, when faced with a difficult situation or choice at work, will think to themselves: "*Doing X would be easiest and quickest for me, but doing Y is better for the client, and/or for my colleagues or employer. So I will put myself and my own needs second and do Y instead of X*".

I am not speaking of being willing to put yourself in physical danger, or break the law, or do absurd things which might harm yourself or your family. Clearly, those things would be wrong and refusing to do them would not amount to putting yourself first or neglecting anyone. Such refusals are wholly justified. I am speaking of situations when what the employee is choosing to dodge or postpone would be merely uncomfortable, stressful or hard, not dangerous or illegal. Such an employee simply doesn't see it as part of his role to be inconvenienced or to be put into uncomfortable situations.

Therefore he will not allow such things to happen if he can possibly avoid it. That is the attitude which I am condemning. It is selfish, unfaithful and a breach of one's clear duty as an employee. When the average UK worker faces an unpleasant task, his mind is focused on the implications *for himself*, not for the client, customer or patient. If their interests would be best served by him staying late, or working through lunch hour, or rewriting a report, or facing up to someone on the client's behalf, or redoing a shoddy piece of research, he is unlikely to do it. It would not suit his own convenience.

He will not put any of that into express words when deciding not to do those things. The decision-making process is all done unconsciously and automatically. It operates in line with his long established default-settings, whereby what is easiest, quickest and least stressful for himself is the obvious choice.

Examine yourself as frankly as you can and ask whether any of this resembles you. Would you put yourself to inconvenience, or do something you are afraid of, or that you have never done before, for the sake of the client/customer, or for your colleagues or boss?

Or would you instinctively try to find some way to avoid doing so? If so, how would you seek to justify that? Or have you never even felt the need to ask yourself such hard questions? If you haven't, then it is most unlikely that you are a really excellent worker. All such people will have already addressed this issue and will now force themselves to choose the path which best suits the client or their firm, not the one which suits themselves, or puts them to the least trouble.

Admittedly, they may not have begun their working career with that unselfish approach, but they will have developed the right attitude over the years. They will therefore be continually imposing those values and priorities upon themselves even when, deep down, they would still prefer to avoid such pressures. The very fact that this approach is a sacrifice is what makes such workers so commendable when they, nevertheless, put the patient or client first, and themselves last.

Fault 9 - Unwillingness to be open about mistakes, or to ask questions, or to admit that they don't know things

I have consistently found that the best staff were the ones who admitted their errors, asked for advice, and openly admitted that they didn't know things. Partly that was because they were more confident and were not plagued by insecurity in the way that the less capable employees were. But there was more to it than that. It was also linked to the employee's level of pride, selfishness and lack of integrity. A faithful, honest, unselfish worker will say:

"I have just made a mistake on this file or task or project. I need to point it out to my supervisor today, so they have the earliest possible chance to intervene and to advise me on how to redeem the situation and protect the client's/customer's/patient's interests. The need to do that comes far ahead of my own feelings, or pride, or what people might think of me. If I must endure some embarrassment now for the sake of the client, then so be it."

However, a proud, selfish, unfaithful, dishonest worker will say to themselves:

"I have made a mistake here, but I will hide it and hope nobody ever notices, as I don't want anybody to think less of me, or to put me to any extra effort to resolve the error. Maybe the client's interests will be harmed by my covering this up, but that's tough. Nobody can expect me to face embarrassment, or to inconvenience myself, for their sake."

The first approach is obviously better for the client and the firm. However, what many staff do not realise is that, in the long term, it is also better for themselves. If you hide your mistakes, or choose not to admit your ignorance, or to seek advice when you need it, then the following things will happen over the years:

- a) You will make more mistakes than the honest, humble, unpretentious employee. He will learn a lesson each time he makes an error and will find out what he ought to have done, whereas you won't. Thus, two or three years later, he will have learned many such lessons and will have become a far more competent, experienced, reliable worker than you.
- b) Bosses will notice you making mistakes anyway, perhaps not immediately, but a few weeks or months later, when your error 'explodes' in your face. It will then be revealed, despite all your efforts to conceal it. Or it may come out when the client himself complains. But, by then, it will be a far more serious matter and may even be impossible for your boss to remedy, because the 'concrete' has set. Thus, you won't, in the longer term, succeed anyway in keeping a reputation as a person who makes no mistakes. You will just be seen as a person who hides them. There is

actually no such thing as an employee who makes no mistakes. We all do. That is a large part of how we learn and it is futile to pretend otherwise.

- c) You will steadily develop a reputation as a worker who cannot be trusted with responsibilities, and especially with new, complex, unfamiliar tasks or files, of the type where mistakes are most likely to be made, or on which advice is most likely to be needed. Thus, even assuming your boss is willing to continue to employ you at all, he is likely to restrict you to simple, familiar tasks that you have done many times before. Then you will learn fewer things, and make even less progress in your career, because your bosses *won't trust you* to be open with them. Conversely, the honest, transparent, unpretentious colleague will be trusted more and more and will therefore be given bigger, higher, better tasks to do. He will also be promoted again and again, whereas you will remain at the bottom, where you belong.

I will now give an example of a situation which arose when I was much younger and worked as what is called an assistant solicitor for a large national law firm. I was one of the lawyers working on a big case for a major commercial client and we had arranged a meeting involving me, a senior colleague who was an associate, one of the partners in the firm, and several senior managers from the client company. We had all gathered to hear our barrister, a top London specialist, give us his advice on the merits of the case and as to the way forward.

Of all the lawyers in the room I was by far the most junior, and the clients were also many years older than me and they all had impressive job titles. So, it was a fairly high-powered meeting. The barrister then began to address us on the case and, in doing so, he used a particular phrase, which I now forget, but it sounded complicated and I had no idea at the time what it meant. I looked around the room, but nobody else seemed to be puzzled and they all seemed to be having no difficulty understanding him. At any rate, nobody asked him what it meant.

He therefore continued to speak and I just listened for a while, without asking him what it meant, in the hope that the meaning of the phrase might become clear to me as he went along, or from the context, or that he might even explain it at some point. But it was no good. A few minutes later I was none the wiser and so I raised my hand, in front of that eminent gathering, and said to the barrister, "*Excuse me, but would you please explain the meaning of that phrase which you are using*".

As soon as I said that, one of the clients, a senior director, said "*I'm so glad you asked that. I have no idea what it means but I didn't like to be the only one to ask.*" I looked around the table and it then emerged that they were *all* in the same position. Not one of them had any idea what the phrase meant, not even the Partner, who was my boss or the Associate who was my senior colleague. So, this barrister had been speaking to a room full of lawyers and senior businessmen without anybody admitting that they didn't know the meaning of the phrase until I put my hand up to ask.

They were all too proud, or too insecure, to admit their ignorance in front of the whole meeting, in case anyone might think less of them or even laugh at them. Yet the lawyers were all charging a high hourly rate, and they owed a duty of care to the client company we were acting for to make sure they knew what they were doing and what was going on. To allow oneself to remain ignorant of the barrister's meaning during that crucially important meeting, for which the client company was paying a fortune in fees, was, in my view, a serious breach of their professional duty.

The managers and directors themselves also owed a duty to their own company, to do their very best and to act in its best interests. But those considerations evidently cut no ice with any of them. At any rate, none of them were willing to risk being embarrassed just in order to do their jobs properly and to fulfil their duties to the company which they worked for. Given the choice, they opted to stay quiet and to save face rather than to be honest about what they didn't know. In my view, that was not only proud, cowardly and foolish, but also unethical. To this day, I wonder what would have happened, and how the remainder of the case conference would have been conducted, if I had not stuck my hand up and asked.

I learned an important lesson that day, which is that it is actually the ablest, most confident, and most knowledgeable person who is likely to ask questions in a meeting, not the least able, or the one who knows the least. Therefore, quite apart from it being your duty to ask, it is actually more likely to impress others, if you are brave enough to ask, than it is to cause them to look down on you. You might imagine that they will laugh or sneer, but the chances are, in reality, that if you don't know what's going on, or what is meant, then the others don't either. So, from that day onwards, I never felt afraid to ask a question again, whoever else was present, and have never held back from doing so.

Let me give you another example, this time of a tragic situation where a proud, selfish nurse actually caused an injury to someone I know. It arose due to her unwillingness to admit her own lack of knowledge and experience, or to seek advice. She was dealing with a patient who had a major abdominal wound following surgery. He had to have what is known as a 'vac', and dressings had to be applied to the wound at regular intervals to protect it and keep it clean and free of infection. The vac worked by applying suction pressure to the wound area.

Taking the vac off and putting it back on was a delicate task. It required a specially trained nurse, or at least one who had seen it demonstrated a few times. One day the vac, and the dressing beneath it, needed to be replaced. Instead of calling for a specialist nurse to apply it, this inexperienced nurse, who had had no training with vacs, tried to do it herself, for the first time ever, and without supervision. The patient himself, who had seen it done many times by specialist nurses, knew exactly how to do it.

He even gently pointed out to the nurse that she was doing it wrongly, and that she needed to apply a special film dressing to the wound first. But she was too proud to be instructed by a patient, even though she could see that he obviously knew far more than her about the vac. Indeed, the very fact that he knew more than she did irritated her and her pride was inflamed by it. So, she pointedly ignored him but did not seek help from any supervisor either, or call in a specialist nurse to do it for her. She just pressed ahead with her own incompetent attempt.

Shortly afterwards, due to her recklessness in doing something which she did not know how to do, the wound developed what is known as a 'fistula'. That is a hole, whereby the contents of the intestines begin to leak out. It occurred due to the wound being subjected to excessive suction pressure. This fistula proved to be a very serious setback and caused much pain and suffering. Yet it could have been so easily avoided if she had simply had the humility to take advice, even from the patient. Better still, she should have gone to a supervisor. Or she could have called in someone else to do it for her, or with her, rather than plough ahead in her pride.

That nurse then walked away from that situation and I expect she will have denied all responsibility for it afterwards, even to herself. Thus, she would not even have learned something from the tragedy. Sadly, many such proud, unteachable employees work in our health service in the UK, and in every other trade or profession too. It is all so depressingly common and yet so totally unnecessary. Choose not to be like that nurse. Make it your policy to *willingly humble yourself* and to take all the advice you can get, without any regard for your pride.

When writing this I was asked what one ought to do if the boss is bad or vindictive. That is what if he is the sort of person who would respond unfairly or harshly to any admission of a mistake or lack of knowledge, such that being open with him would put you at risk? I recognise that such bosses do exist, who would punish openness rather than reward it. However, that is not common, because even bad bosses want their business to run well and can see the advantage of staff who are open with them.

So, they might be rude or ungracious when you admit errors or seek advice, but it is unlikely that they would sack you for that, or even think less of you. Such apprehension is largely based on the employee's imagination and they would not actually get into trouble for being open. But even if it is not imaginary, it is still better to take the risk and be open, given all the advantages that flow from being so. In any case, if your boss really is so stupid as to punish openness and reward secrecy, you are probably in the wrong job anyway. If so, start looking for another job and a better boss, who values openness.

Fault 10 - Failing to give honour to their bosses and even directly dishonouring them

It is very common for employees to dislike their bosses and to disparage them in private conversations. Some see this as justifiable, and even necessary, as an outlet for stress and tension at work. Many also see it as their right to despise their boss and to speak freely to undermine him behind his back. Yet, where would such a right come from? If you feel such contempt for your boss, you should not be working for him at all. If nothing else, such disrespect is in breach of the implied duties that are contained within your contract of employment.

Nevertheless, many employees speak ill of their bosses when they are not there. Some even show disrespect and contempt when they *are* there. Anyone who operates in that way is not pleasing to God and will suffer harm as a result. It is important to your future success as an employee, and perhaps one day as a boss yourself, that you learn how to respect and honour those who are currently your bosses. If you don't it will have an impact, not only on how you are seen now by bosses, but on your own future career.

A resentful, disrespectful employee will never learn or grow as much as one who honours their boss. Besides that, the "*law of sowing and reaping*" means that whatever you do to your bosses on the way up will, one day, be done to you if you ever become a boss yourself. God will make sure of that because He has stated that "*whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*". I can testify to the truth of this in my own career. When I was a young police officer, and later as a young lawyer, there were some bosses whom I felt were incompetent, lazy or untalented and therefore I did not respect them.

I often felt that they had less ability than me. In part, my assessment of them was accurate, though not entirely so, and, to that extent, I was unfair to them. I learned later that their roles were far more complex and difficult than they had seemed to me when I was a mere onlooker from below, before I had to do their jobs myself. I also found in later years that I sometimes received the same kind of criticism and disrespect that I had shown to my old bosses, and even more so. Therefore, if you are in a junior position now, do not join in when others talk about bosses or snigger about their errors, problems or faults.

Go out of your way to be different. Stand aside from the crowd and show honour to those who are senior to you, even when it may not seem to you to be deserved. The reason for honouring a boss is not because he necessarily *deserves* it, but because it is *inherently right* that you should. It is also because of the beneficial effect upon yourself of learning how to honour those who manage you. Such honour is rarely given, at least in the UK, where many employees take a perverse delight in tearing down those who are above them.

Decide now that you will be different and that, no matter what sort of boss you have, whether good or bad, capable or incapable, fair or unfair, you will force yourself to show him honour and respect. This will please God. He sees all work as being done, ultimately, for Him, and He has put those bosses in charge of you, if only for a season, for you to learn from them. You will also grow more, and learn more quickly, precisely *because* you are honouring your boss as it is hard to learn anything from anyone when you feel contempt in your heart towards them.

If you cultivate this attitude of honour you will learn far more from every type of boss, both the good and the bad, the impressive and the unimpressive. That is important, because God will ensure that you get exposure to every type of boss, both to learn how things *should* be done, and also how they should *not be*. One of the best ways in which you can honour a boss, and help them, whilst also benefitting yourself, is to pray for them. Make it your regular practice to do so, regardless of how that boss treats you, or what you think of them.

Do so simply because God has put them into that position as your boss, at least for a while, and because it is therefore your duty to support them in prayer. I don't mean that you should simply pray that the boss will treat *you* better or make *your* life easier. It is OK to pray for that, from time to time, but what I mean is that you should pray *for that boss himself, for his benefit not yours*, and for God to bless,

guide, help and protect *him*. Such unselfish prayers will please God, and benefit the boss, and also the business.

However, the very fact that you regularly pray in that way will also change you. Your heart attitude will steadily alter and you will begin to see the whole situation differently, and *as God sees it*, rather than solely from your own self-absorbed perspective. Moreover, pursuant to the law of sowing and reaping which we saw above, God will respond to your prayers by one day causing someone else to pray for you, and perhaps many of them, because you will most certainly reap what you sow, not only in this way, but in every other way too.

By the way, *don't tell your boss* that you are praying for him, and don't tell your colleagues either. Just do it, quietly and faithfully, and keep it to yourself. Let God be the only one who knows. That way you won't be misunderstood or considered to be either a religious weirdo or a creep, or as being out to get something for yourself. Moreover, the more your boss upsets you, the more you should pray for him. Do that instead of moaning about him. Then wait and see what God does as a result, not only now, but also in years to come.

Fault 11 - Lack of interest, self-motivation and enthusiasm

Many staff are willing to work hard on something that interests them, or when they can see the point of it, or where it will be noticed or attract praise. But they will not do so on tasks which are dull, dirty, or inconspicuous, or whose purpose is less clear. That attitude will blight your career if you don't root it out. You need to show enthusiasm and interest, and be self-motivated no matter what the task is, or who it is for, or whether your work will ever be recognised. Therefore, no matter what the task is, *decide to be interested in it*, and to do your best, even if it is not naturally interesting.

When I had just turned 16 I got a summer job at a large textile mill. I had to empty waste bins of various types of scrap yarn and fabric and pack them into large containers. The man whose regular job this had been was off sick long term. A huge backlog of waste material had therefore built up in number 2 mill. The management only asked me to just keep up with the inflow of new additional waste and to prevent the backlog from getting any bigger. That was all they expected of me. However, when I saw the mountain of waste stored in No. 2 mill, I actually felt inspired by the challenge.

I therefore set about trying not only to prevent it increasing, but to reduce it and even to remove it entirely. On the face of it, emptying waste bins and clearing away piles of fabric is not inherently exciting. However, I decided to make it into a race and I set myself ambitious targets to get my main work finished early in the day and then to spend the rest of each day getting the backlog down. I kept at this remorselessly, from June to September. Then, on my very last day at the mill, before I returned to school to start 6th Form, I completely emptied No. 2 mill of the last remnants of the backlog.

The huge storage area then stood totally empty. I got a tremendous sense of satisfaction, and even triumph, from achieving that. But nobody had ever expected, or asked, me to do it. I just wanted to, for my own sake, so as to do my very best. Then, to my great surprise, the Production Director, who sat on the main board of that large company, came over to see me. He had heard about me and was intrigued as to how I had got it all done so fast. He also questioned me about my exam results, which had just come out. Then he offered me a position for the future as a trainee manager at Carrington Viyella!

He did so based primarily on the attitude I had shown in working so tenaciously, and entirely on my own initiative, to clear away all that waste. It may seem very mundane, but he could see what it signified. I thanked him for the offer, but said I was planning to become a lawyer. So that job never materialised, but it could have, and would have done, if I had wanted it. It shows that promotion opportunities can arise in the most unexpected ways, if you work hard all the time, and also that there are far more people watching, and taking notice, than you realise.

Fault 12 - Being content to settle for mediocrity rather than seeking to become the very best they can possibly be in terms of skill, knowledge and experience

This is linked to the last point, but also stands alone as a separate issue. I am referring to how many staff have such a poverty of ambition and aspiration when it comes to the development of their own skills, knowledge and experience. I often felt dismayed at the attitude of many of my staff. They had no hunger or thirst to learn more, or to stretch their own experience, or to gain exposure to new, different, and more difficult files or projects. This was even the case when they were starting out in their careers, at a time when they surely ought to be at their most ambitious.

By contrast, when I was training as a police officer, and later as a lawyer, I took every opportunity to ask for the hardest files and cases. I always wanted to get exposure to new and unusual cases involving different situations and issues, so as to maximise my experience and expand my CV. I volunteered for tasks and cases which others didn't want, precisely in order to be able to learn more, learn faster and increase my repertoire. I also used to impose additional voluntary study upon myself in my own time, and asked to go on every available training course.

I was also always reading, including whole text books – lots of them, which I devoured from cover to cover. I was still doing that, even when I was in my late forties, and had advanced a long way in my legal career. I basically never stopped educating myself. Over a sustained period of time that approach had a profound effect, as it was bound to do for anyone, not just me. It enabled me to get far ahead of many of my contemporaries, who were so much less ambitious. Their main aim was just to have an easy life and to go home on time.

For example, when I was a trainee solicitor I volunteered for as much advocacy work as I could get, not only on my own files, but on my bosses' files too, to save them the effort. This meant I got a bigger, broader exposure to court work than my colleagues, and helped me to become better at it. Also, when I qualified, I volunteered to do advocacy in front of High Court judges. They could be extremely intimidating, but I wanted to learn as much as possible. I also volunteered for Employment Tribunals, and conducted a complex two-day trial by myself immediately after I qualified.

My opponent at that hearing was a senior barrister in his forties who was also a part-time judge. So it was scary, but I still wanted to do it, even though it was hard and stretched me to, and beyond, my limits. I wanted to be the best that I was capable of being and not to miss any opportunity to learn. I remember also, when I was a trainee solicitor, some of our commercial clients had problems with Gypsies camping on their land. None of my colleagues wanted to take those files on, but I volunteered. It meant learning how to make a new and unusual form of application for possession.

I also had to go to the Gypsy camps in person to speak to them, and to drive wooden stakes into the ground with eviction notices attached to them in order to get them out. My colleagues considered that unpleasant work, and also intimidating. But I felt it added to my experience and was good for me, which it was. Therefore, don't be passive and don't ever settle for being average or mediocre. Aim as high as you can go. That doesn't mean you need to be the best, as that may not be possible. We obviously can't all be the best. But we can all be the best that *we personally are capable of being*.

That is a very different objective and one which we should all aim for. That said, very few people do. Therefore, if you decide to be one of that small minority, you will go far and do well. You may even end up actually being the best even if, in natural terms, you were not the most talented or gifted to begin with. That is because you will make the most of your abilities, whereas your colleagues won't. Neither will they be willing to pay the necessary price to achieve it. Therefore, they will only ever operate at 50% or less of their capacity and will never reach their full potential.

Fault 13 – Lack of initiative or inventiveness and giving no thought to how the systems and procedures of their job could be altered or improved

I have often been amazed at the inefficient or even absurd procedures which employees will operate, quite robotically. They continue to do so without ever questioning *why* things are done in that way or thinking of better, easier, quicker or cheaper alternatives. A really inefficient, even silly, procedure might have been put in place years ago by some past supervisor, or even by a lowly employee. Now, everyone operates in that way, quite slavishly, without ever thinking about it or questioning it, or showing any initiative at all.

The accepted current procedure could involve the metaphorical equivalent of going seven ways round an octagon. Yet nobody says “*Why do we do it this way? Why don't we just change direction and go one way round the octagon, instead of seven ways?*” Whatever task you are doing, especially if it is at a low level, such that managers don't get involved in it themselves, or don't even see it being done, there are likely to be many ways in which it could be handled more efficiently. Surprisingly few employees ever give the procedures or systems any thought, or spend any time thinking of how those could be improved.

Yet that person might be doing that task once or twice a day, or even twenty times a day. If instead they began to question themselves about it, and to ponder on it, they would probably think of something, however small, which would make the procedure better for themselves, the business and its clients. As for why employees give no thought to such things, or don't offer their ideas to management even if they do think of any, there are various possibilities:

- a) They may be inherently unimaginative people who are not gifted with any creativity or problem-solving skills. However, this explanation must be rare because in most cases the task is done so often, and the inefficiencies are so obvious, that almost anybody who cared could eventually identify them, even if they aren't gifted.
- b) More likely it is because they have switched off mentally while at work. They then operate as an unthinking automaton, just following procedures while their mind is elsewhere, day-dreaming.
- c) Then again, it may be that they have actually suggested changes or improvements in the past, but they found that those were not appreciated, or were not implemented. So, they no longer bother to speak up.
- d) They may be excessively deferential, such that they feel it is not their place to offer ideas to managers or, even less, to criticise procedures. So, they say nothing.
- e) In some cases there is a sense of resentment, or even malice, such that they are actually aware of how things could be improved, but they are simply not willing to help management. Thus, they keep quiet as a form of spite, thinking to themselves “*Why should I help them?*”

If any of these factors apply in your own case, then set them aside. Begin to examine your own job daily, searching for possible ways in which you could do it better, quicker, cheaper and more effectively, so as to benefit all concerned. The very process of doing so will not only yield useful ideas. It will also *change you*. In particular, it will help you to develop the *habit* of looking for ways to improve things. Everybody ought to be doing that, but the truth is that most of us aren't.

If you adopt this approach, and keep doing it for long enough, you may end up a supervisor or manager yourself. In my own law firm I used to offer a £50 tax free reward to any member of staff who came up with an idea, or who could point out to me *anything at all*, however small, which was bad or wrong or inefficient or wasteful in any of our procedures or systems. Surprisingly few took me up on it, even though I was eager to pay the bonuses.

Therefore, one thing I did, and which I wish I had had time to do more of, was to do the staff's jobs myself occasionally, even if only for an hour or two. When I did, I would often see inefficiencies in the procedures they used which appalled me. I would then immediately change the procedures or systems. I would recommend that approach to any manager. Try to go on reception, or drive the vans, or go on the telephones, or the production line. Then see what people actually do, and *how they do it*, and many ideas for improvement will come to you.

Fault 14 - Unwillingness to be corrected, criticised or rebuked, even when it is done constructively, and also resenting, or even hating, any boss who seeks to do so

The Bible says "*if you rebuke a fool, he will hate you*". I have consistently found that to be true, especially within the workplace. Even though my criticism was always given constructively, and politely, with the aim of helping them to improve, many staff resented it. The main cause of that reaction was their pride. They considered it an outrage for anybody to correct them and they had no desire to improve, or to serve clients better, or to become more skilled. They just wanted an easy life and to be left alone to continue to operate at their current level, without anybody wanting them to change.

However, without constructive criticism from colleagues or bosses you are much less likely to learn about your faults and weaknesses. We tend to be blind to those in ourselves, and cannot see them, unless someone else points them out. It may be deflating, or even wounding, when they do, especially if the person giving the criticism is not kind or gracious. But it is still for your benefit. Therefore, force yourself not only to listen willingly, and to apply the criticisms that are given, but even to *appreciate* those who give them.

Moreover, if someone does give you constructive criticism, or if they just complain to you about your conduct, attitude or performance, try really hard not to excuse or justify yourself, or even to explain, *until after they have completely finished speaking*. Let them get the whole thing 'off their chest' without you saying anything, and without even allowing your face to look surprised, aggrieved or indignant. You may not realise it, but the human face 'speaks' very clearly, even when you don't say a word with your mouth. Therefore the person who is trying to correct you will instantly pick up the signals and see that you resent what they are saying, or are irritated, or that you are not really listening to them *and are actually just thinking of what you want to say in reply*.

Don't do that. Not only does it prevent you from genuinely listening, it also makes the other person feel (often quite rightly) that there is no point in trying to talk to you because you aren't receptive to any correction. Therefore, don't say anything. Just listen attentively, nod and show recognition at appropriate times and, above all, *don't argue, 'answer back', or seek to justify yourself*. The time for that, if at all, is when they have been fully allowed to make their point, and when you have completely understood and seen why it matters *from their perspective*. Then thank the person for sharing it with you and give a genuine apology. Make sure that all of that has been fully and properly done before you even begin to give your side of the story.

If you have not yet been a boss yourself, you may have no idea how hard it is, and what a sacrifice it can be, to risk giving constructive criticism. Anyone who does so knows it will probably be resented rather than appreciated, even if it is totally valid. The reality is most staff like bosses who leave them alone, make no demands of them, and don't expect them to change or grow. They will then dislike any bosses who attempt any of those things. Therefore, be different and force yourself not to be so proud or foolish as to operate in that way. Don't merely be willing to be criticised. Positively seek for it.

Invite bosses and senior colleagues to point out anything that they think requires improvement. Reassure them that you really do want to hear it, and will value it, and not take offence. That is necessary because most colleagues have learned, from painful experience, that such comments provoke antagonism. Therefore, even bosses tend to refrain from offering any criticism, for the sake of having

an easier life themselves. But it is not actually in your long-term interests for your bosses to stay silent, if you want to become as good at your job as you can possibly be.

Fault 15 – Being discontented with their wages, hours, terms and working conditions and feeling envious and resentful about what others have, or earn, or are allowed to do

One of the most damaging heart attitudes that a person can develop in the workplace, or anywhere else, is to be *discontented*, especially if it is accompanied by envy or resentment. Discontent reduces a person's motivation and also makes them clash with colleagues and become dysfunctional within a team. Focusing on what others have, as compared to you, is not constructive and does not spur you on to greater achievement or better quality work. On the contrary, a discontented person will usually reduce their work rate to match their own jaundiced perception of what they get from the employer.

Therefore, if they think the employer pays them too little, or provides unsatisfactory terms and conditions, they will persuade themselves that reducing the level of their effort is justifiable. However, even if your assessment of the fairness of your pay and conditions is objective and accurate, which is unlikely, you would still be better off adopting a satisfied frame of mind and feeling grateful for everything you do have. By so doing you will keep up your own motivation levels, be a good team member, relate better with colleagues and bosses, and give off a more positive demeanour.

Moreover, even if your pay is not generous, or is even unfair, the best way to get it increased is by impressing the employer with your positive attitude and high work-rate. But such attitudes and responses are unlikely to come from a negative, embittered person. Therefore, do yourself a favour and stay positive, even if you aren't being treated fairly. If need be, in the end, you can always move to another employer. But even that is easier to achieve if, in the meantime, you can avoid becoming sour towards your current employer.

Resentment will not only reduce your motivation and output in your current job. It will also seep out through your face and voice at any job interviews you have. Whatever is going on inside you will inevitably come out, even if you try to hide it. As Jesus said: "*Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks*". Therefore, to avoid developing a poisonous heart attitude, and having it spill over and become evident to others, cultivate an attitude of contentment. Force yourself to count your blessings and to express them, especially to yourself, and try very hard never to be negative.

Fault 16 - Unfaithfulness to colleagues, such that they let others down, fail to pull their weight and even engage in gossip

Human beings are sinful and inherently self-centred. Therefore, a person's main focus is usually upon what they can get *from* others and on *how others treat them*. However, if you want to become a mature disciple, and also a good employee and colleague, you must reverse that. Your aim must be to make sure that *you* are faithful, fair and loyal *towards others*, rather than being pre-occupied with whether they display those traits towards you. Such a profound change of approach requires deliberate effort and will never occur automatically or merely by the passage of time.

To achieve it you have to persistently redirect your thoughts, attitudes and priorities. That way you can ensure that you are giving and contributing properly to others, rather than trying to make sure that you are receiving enough from them. This unselfish approach to life is so alien to our sinful nature, and also to British culture, it has to be a discipline which you impose upon yourself until it eventually turns into a habit. You need to make it your goal to ensure that you are never contributing less than you should.

It must become a matter of professional pride never to let your colleagues down, use them, take advantage of them, or speak disloyally about them. Avoiding all of that needs to really matter to you.

But it will never be achieved unless you *make* it happen because such attitudes will not develop by themselves. Sadly, the average employee doesn't see it that way and is not pursuing such a policy. Therefore, he will call in sick when he is not actually ill and give no thought to the extra burdens their absence imposes on colleagues. Or they will not make a full effort in their work and leave it to others to get the job done.

Even worse, they will gossip about colleagues and act deviously or manipulatively to obtain advantages for themselves at the expense of others. All of this is wrong in itself, but the operative point is that it will also prevent you from being the kind of worker that God wants you to be. Aim therefore to become the most loyal, faithful, reliable, discreet and trustworthy worker in your place of work. That won't be hard because few, if any, of your colleagues will be competing with you for that title. Indeed, the thought will never occur to them and if it was suggested to them, they would consider it absurd.

Fault 17 - Automatically assuming themselves to be in the right and to be the most important person in the room

This is an endemic problem. Whenever any issue or dispute arises, people have programmed themselves to assume, automatically, that they are in the right and that the other person is in the wrong. Thus, if a conflict arises, or if there is a scarcity of resources, such that it has to be decided who should get what, and who must do without, or wait until later, the average person sees himself as obviously:

- a) right on the facts
- b) in the right as to the merits of the argument
- c) the most deserving person in the company
- d) the most important person in the company

This ingrained self-centredness and introspection causes each party in a dispute to see the situation entirely from their own perspective. There is little or no recognition of the needs, rights or importance of others and no serious thought as to *whether* they themselves are actually in the right. That is assumed as an absolute given. As they see it, the only task is to *prove* to others that they are in the right, not to *find out* for themselves *whether* they are.

A whole group of people can therefore engage in an argument over resources, roles, status, duties, etc, without any of them ever questioning themselves as to whether they are right and/or whether their own claim or case is more or less valid than the other person's. This is the cause of much tension in the workplace. Therefore, if you stop seeing yourself and your own needs and wants as central, you will become a much more useful member of any team, and a far less frequent cause of conflict.

Fault 18 - Being unable to see themselves as they really are, and as others see them, but only as they imagine themselves to be

This perennial problem is linked to the above point. Very few people are able, or willing, to see themselves objectively, as they really are, and as others see them. They therefore persist in seeing themselves through a subjective and highly flattering lens. Their own faults, weaknesses and selfish ways become invisible to them, whereas other people's are seen in sharp focus. This is the natural condition of the human race, and the Scottish poet, Robbie Burns, famously wrote about it in his poem 'To a louse':

"O would some power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us."
Robert Burns

The only ‘cure’ for this blindness is to force ourselves to examine ourselves more objectively. That includes interrogating ourselves as to what we are really doing, whether we are being fair or unfair, selfish or unselfish, honest or dishonest about a given issue or situation. In the absence of such rigorous cross-examination of oneself, one will always remain blind. Therefore, don’t wait for an accurate view of yourself to arise naturally by itself. It never will.

You must set about producing it deliberately, by a conscious decision, and over a sustained period of time. Become one of those extremely rare people who are capable of stepping to one side and scrutinising themselves objectively, as if they were someone else, or as if the piece of work had been done by someone else. Then you will be much less prone to deluding yourself as to what you really are, or how good the work was, or who was at fault.

Fault 19 - Having no understanding of duty or responsibility and instead thinking exclusively in terms of rights and entitlements

This attitude is a widespread problem which goes far beyond the workplace, but also has a real impact on the kind of workers we become. Our generation has become more self-absorbed than any other generation in history. There is now very little grasp of the meaning of duty. Few even know what it is, let alone take it seriously or feel bound by it. The average person is preoccupied with their real or imagined rights and the ‘*entitlement culture*’, as we saw in chapter 10. They won’t put themselves out to fulfil any sense of duty to others. Indeed, the very concept is alien to them.

This contrasts starkly with the generations which fought World Wars 1 and 2. In 1914 there was an extremely clear and widespread understanding of duty. Even in that horrific war, Great Britain felt no need to conscript any men into the armed forces until well into 1916. Until then, we relied solely on volunteers. Yet there was no shortage. They were utterly unlike our own pampered generation which thinks overwhelmingly in terms of rights and entitlements, with virtually no concept of duty, or of honour either.

Therefore, swim against the tide of our generation and its “*me first*” values. Train yourself to identify your duties and to embrace them rather than avoid them. Be the sort of worker whose main focus is on what they are *obliged to do* for their firm, colleagues, clients and bosses, not on what they are *entitled to receive* from them. Many will think you are naïve, or even a fool, for thinking in such public-spirited terms. But do it anyway. Be determined to be different and refuse to be defined or limited by the self-serving standards of the age we live in.

Fault 20 - Cowardice - mainly morally, but also physically

Few people view cowardice as a fault or a sin. Many assume that the desire to avoid risk, pressure or unpopularity is entirely normal. They also feel that it is legitimate to do whatever is needed to protect themselves and to keep away from people, places or situations which they are afraid of. However, that is not how God sees it. He takes the view that cowardice is a very major sin. Indeed, in the list of sins of those people who are heading into the Lake of Fire in Revelation chapter 21, cowardice is the first one named, implying that it is highly significant:

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”
Revelation 21:8 (RSV)

I think cowardice is included in that verse because it is actually a form of selfishness whereby your duties to others are seen as less important than your own self-preservation, or the avoidance of things that you fear. Cowardice causes a person not to do things which they should do, and to do many other things which they ought not to do. It all comes from deciding not to control and overcome their own

fears. Thus cowardice is not only a major sin in itself. It also leads one indirectly into various other forms of sin, neglect, unfaithfulness and disobedience.

Within the workplace, cowardice is a major issue. It causes people to fail in their duty and to do all sorts of wrong things as a result of giving in to their fears, rather than choosing to face them. Therefore, let's get this really straight, so there can be no misunderstanding. The mere fact that you are afraid is *no basis* for assuming that you are entitled to avoid what you fear. There are many times where your clear duty is to face your fear head on, and do whatever is scaring you, rather than run away from it. Moreover, you must do it *while you are still afraid*.

You might be acting for a client and it becomes necessary to do something you have never done before, or don't know how to do, and you are afraid to try. Instead of doing what *you want*, and avoiding the challenge, do what *he needs* and face up to it. It could be that your client needs you to go and negotiate hard with an opponent whom you find intimidating, and whom you would prefer to avoid. If so, force yourself to go. Make yourself engage in those negotiations and do your very best for that client, rather than sacrificing his interests for the sake of avoiding what you fear.

Few people admit, even to themselves, what they are really doing when they avoid danger or difficulty and choose the easy option. The truth is it amounts to selfishness. You are putting your own desire to avoid being scared ahead of your duty to the client, or to your colleagues, boss or the firm as a whole. Whoever you are letting down, *your fears do not excuse your cowardice* or justify you in choosing not to do what you fear. It is actually the fear which gives you the opportunity to display courage. Indeed, there cannot be courage without fear, because all courage involves facing and overcoming your fear.

I recognised this problem early in my working career and resolved that I would never make any decision, take any action, or avoid any action, based on my own fears. Of course, I still had fears, as everyone does. But I decided that I had to treat these fears as being entirely irrelevant when deciding *what I must do* on behalf of my client or my boss or my firm. They, and their needs, had to come first. Therefore, my own fears had to be ignored, overcome, or endured.

At any rate, I knew I could not allow them to have any influence over me. I would urge you to take that same approach, not only in the workplace, but everywhere in life. Do what you *should* do, not what you *want* to do, and do it regardless of whether you are afraid. In other words, never excuse yourself from any valid duty just because you are afraid. Once you begin to face up to your fears in this way, and refuse to be ruled by them, they will start to shrink, and might even disappear entirely.

The demons' standard tactic is to whip up fear in you, so as to get you to do what is wrong, or to fail to do what is right. But when they see that you have resolved to rule out any consideration of what you fear when making your decisions, a large part of their power over you is removed. You then become free. If so, you have won a major victory, which will have far-reaching consequences, in every area of your life, in particular in turning you into an overcomer.

Fault 21 - Unwillingness to start at the bottom

Whether due to pride, arrogance or laziness, many people want to start their career half way up the ladder, rather than from the bottom. However, the only way to learn a job properly, or to really understand a business, is to get your hands dirty and do the real job on the shop floor together with the other workers. That is the best way to learn how their jobs are meant to be done, which is a huge advantage if your aim is to manage or supervise them one day.

Thus, if you want a career in retail management for example, make sure you get plenty of experience on the shop floor, doing all the basic tasks, so that you really know the 'brass tacks' of how a shop operates. Years later, when you are the Store Manager, or the Regional Manager or even the Managing Director, nobody will be able to pull the wool over your eyes. In the past it was normal to start at the

bottom, but there is a greater reluctance today to do so. I would urge you to take the opposite approach. Positively seek to gain such experience rather than trying to skip it on your way up the ladder.

Fault 22 - Unwillingness to take extra work home voluntarily, or to work late, or to do anything outside of their stated contractual terms, or to do anything which isn't measured or targeted

It is, of course, wrong to be a 'workaholic' and to spend your whole life at work, such that you neglect your spouse or children. However, a far larger number of people go to the other extreme, whereby they are reluctant to do anything, however small, which is not strictly part of their agreed contractual terms. They leave work bang on time, refuse to take a briefcase home, and won't study in their own time or consider work-related matters when they are not at the office.

One needs a sense of balance and proportion, but that is not to be found at either end of the spectrum. However, in my opinion, you need to be nearer to the willing and flexible end of that spectrum than to the unwilling and inflexible end. A good worker is not a '*clock watcher*'. Neither is he a '*terms and conditions watcher*'. He is therefore willing to do extra things, which are not in his contract, even at short notice, and even without pay, when the needs of the client, or of the firm, require it.

Of course, it may be different for a shift worker with strictly set hours. But if you are salaried, or a trainee, or if you have any supervisory responsibilities, be willing to be flexible when the need arises. Above all, do not be obstructive or resentful about it. By adopting such a positive and willing attitude you will provide a far better service and rise higher in your career. You will also be much happier in your work while you are doing so.

Another issue, which is a vexed problem for managers and supervisors, is that there is a strong tendency for staff to only do those tasks which are measured and targeted by the company. Then other things, which are not measured, or which can't be measured, are neglected, done badly, left until later, or not done at all. Many employees take the view that they will only do those tasks which will result in them being noticed, acknowledged or rewarded and not those which are less visible or which the management are not actively measuring.

From a manager's perspective this attitude presents a major difficulty, and one which is not easy to solve if you are dealing with staff who do not have high levels of personal integrity and self-discipline and who are not strongly client-focused. The problem for the manager is as follows:

- a) If nothing is measured or targeted, then some of the staff will do very little work. In particular, they will avoid the difficult, unpleasant, unenjoyable tasks.
- b) If, however, only certain tasks are measured, and only key objectives are targeted, then it is likely that only those things will be done, and all the other things will be neglected or left undone. There will be all sorts of perverse incentives to do what looks good in the figures, even though it is not good for the clients or the business.
- c) If, however, you then try to solve that problem by measuring and targeting virtually everything then you end up with a working day which, for most staff, and also their supervisors, consists of little else but filling in forms, ticking boxes and examining printouts and schedules, rather than doing the actual substantive work.

As I said, it is vexed problem for managers and there is no easy solution to it, because every option has its own bundle of disadvantages and unintended consequences. Let me give just a few of examples of how measuring and targeting certain specific aspects of a worker's job can cause him to act in a perverse manner and to harm the interests of the clients and the business itself. Some time ago I rang up the Student Finance Company to assist with my children's applications for student loans.

I had to ring a large call centre whose staff were heavily measured and targeted. I then said to the girl who answered the phone, “*Hello, I am ringing to ask two questions*”. To my surprise, as soon as I said that, *she hung up on me!* I later told that story to someone I know who works in a large public sector organisation and he said that the reason she would have hung up is that her employer was targeting her *on how quickly she can complete each call.*

If she took too long *on one call* she would be penalised but, if she could get each of her calls finished in less than a specified number of minutes, she would be rewarded. So, to avoid penalties and maximise her chances of rewards, she simply hung up on anybody who sounded as if they had a complex question, or anyone who had more than one question to ask. Of course, that was not what the Student Finance Company wanted, but it was the actual result, albeit unintended, of their arbitrary and ill thought-out measurement procedures.

Another example arose when I was buying a particular type of laptop which the shop near where I live did not have in stock. So, they rang another branch of their shop in another town, which had got one in stock, and told them to courier that particular laptop to me. I then paid for it and waited for it to be delivered. However, it did not turn up and when I rang the shop to ask why it had not arrived, I was told that an employee in the other shop had subsequently sold my laptop to another customer there, even though it had already been paid for and was my property.

The reason why he did it was not due to any error or misunderstanding. He had done it knowingly and deliberately, so as to boost his own *personal sales figures*. That resulted in inconvenience for me as the customer, plus it caused damage to that company’s reputation. On top of that there was a lot of extra administration for the staff of my local shop as they searched for another laptop for me.

However, none of that will have bothered the employee in the other branch, because none of that was being measured, whereas his own individual sales figures were. That was all that he was interested in. My purchase did not count as a sale by him, but had been attributed to the sales assistant in my local shop. Therefore, his own commercial interests did not coincide with those of the other shop assistant, or of the company which was their employer.

Let me give another example which shows what can go wrong when employees are excessively or inappropriately monitored and measured. This time it is from my own experience as a police officer in the 1980s, in comparison to how things are dealt with today. When I was on foot patrol back then I used to ‘stop’ quite a few people at night and check them out, very informally, to see if they were up to no good. I also used to stop an even larger number of cars, both at night and in the day, to see what I might find, such as drunk drivers or no insurance and so on.

In those days I could do all of that quite freely, without needing to fill in any forms, and without any supervisor breathing down my neck or questioning me about *why* I had stopped that particular person or car. Therefore, I was able to catch a lot of offenders on the simple basis that, having stopped so many, I was statistically likely to do so. I used to say “*You have to kiss a lot of frogs to find your prince.*”

Now, however, due to hugely increased racial sensitivities and the general climate of political correctness, the police are very closely monitored as to *whom* they stop and what *race or religion* they are, and even their *age, gender, or sexual orientation*. Therefore, in order to counteract the allegation that officers are ‘persecuting’ particular groups, the police began to impose increasingly stringent administrative procedures to monitor the statistics. They want to ascertain exactly *what types of people* are being stopped and questioned or searched etc and to make sure that no one group is ‘over-represented’.

The problem is that the only way that can be done is for senior officers to require constables to fill in a form every time they stop anyone and to record who it was, why they were stopped, what they were suspected of, and on what basis, and also their ethnic, religious, age and gender profile. As you can

imagine, that is a lot of paperwork. It also takes a long time to fill it in and it therefore creates even more delay and even greater irritation amongst the very few people who are now stopped.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the police officers have responded to such over-zealous monitoring by simply not stopping or questioning *anybody*, unless the situation is extremely clear cut. But the problem is that works against the public interest because it means that the guilty are allowed to get on with their criminal activities, largely unhindered. I should clarify, by the way, what I mean when I say I used to 'stop' lots of people. I don't mean that I arrested them, or wrestled them to the ground, or even spoke to them formally. Not at all.

All I did was to start a friendly conversation and see how they reacted. Then I would decide, based on their manner, attitude and demeanour, and also from the context of where and when I came across them, and what else was happening at the time, whether I felt any suspicion and whether to take it any further. So, for example, if I saw a person walking along a street at 3.00 am I would just say hello and strike up a conversation, perhaps about the weather or something equally innocuous. Then I would gauge their reaction, and see whether they were nervous, cagey, or even hostile.

If so, I would begin to question them more probingly. If not, I would walk on and say goodnight. Therefore, from their perspective, they were never actually '*stopped*' as such. They were merely *spoken to*. I used my common sense and only reclassified it as officially stopping them if, in all the circumstances, I felt it was warranted. My bosses were happy with that practical, informal approach because they too operated on the basis of common sense and they knew that it worked.

However, the new generation of uber-PC liberal zealots who occupy the higher ranks of our police forces, and also the Home Office, see things very differently. Common sense, and trusting the individual officer's judgment, play no part in their thinking. But all they have actually achieved, by trying to stamp out *inappropriate* stops or searches, is to ensure that there are *none at all*, or at least too few to achieve the objective of preventing crime and detecting and apprehending offenders which is, or used to be, what the job was all about.

As an employee, especially if you are currently in a junior position, there is not much that you can do to solve the wider problems described above. But what you can do is to make sure that your own actions, decisions and time allocation are not skewed in those ways and that you act with integrity and faithfulness and do *every part of your job, not just those parts which are measured*.

If you will do that, and do what is right, not just what looks good on paper, then it probably won't be noticed right now or show up in this month's figures. However, it will show up in the long term and managers will eventually notice. But even if they don't, you will at least have done the right thing and you will also learn some important lessons, not only about how the job should be done, but also about how bad staff operate, which will be of great use to you when you later become a manager yourself.

Fault 23 - Being a negative, defeatist '*can't do person*' who can only see obstacles, and reasons why things cannot be done, rather than advantages, solutions and possible ways forward

A remarkable number of workers, at least in the UK, have an entrenched mind-set of negativity and pessimism. They can generally only see reasons why things *can't* be done, not how they *could* be. They are also fixated with what problems and disadvantages lie ahead if a step is taken, rather than the possible benefits or opportunities that might flow from taking it. Such a person within a team, committee or office is a menace. They sap the initiative and imagination out of others, prevent things from happening, and thwart other people's creativity and problem-solving skills.

I call them '*can't do people*' and also '*Eeyores*', after the gloomy friend of Winnie the Pooh, who is pessimistic about everything. A pessimist is actually a perversion of a useful character type, which is good to have on a team. I am referring to the cautious, reflective, problem-finder, who searches for

possible snags and issues that might arise in future. However, they don't do that because they are negative, but only to *anticipate, address and resolve* problems in a constructive way, before they ever arise. That kind of person is actually very positive, and they are of huge value on a team or committee.

Their diligent forethought can prevent all sorts of problems from ever materialising at all. However, I am not talking about them. I am referring to those who misuse the talent for looking ahead and anticipating problems. Actually, in most cases they don't have that skill at all. They are just thoroughly negative people full stop, and often take a perverse pleasure from preventing things even being attempted. Everything depends on your motive, and on what your intentions, are when you search for snags and problems that might lie ahead.

If you are doing it with the aim of finding or anticipating potential issues so as to *solve them in advance*, and prevent problems further down the line, then that is healthy. You would be a useful team member. But if you are doing it because you are sour, negative and defeatist, or because you don't actually want the project to succeed for personal reasons of your own, then that is extremely unhealthy. Your team or firm would be better off if you were not part of it. That is a sad thing to say, but it is true of many workers.

People sometimes become like that because they are resentful or embittered about past failures of their own, for which they may have felt they were blamed. Or perhaps it is because they know they are not an imaginative or creative person, of the kind that dreams up new ideas or business proposals. Therefore, they soothe their own sense of inferiority by trying to prove that other people's ideas won't work and shouldn't be tried. They can't raise themselves up, but they can at least bring others down, and they get a perverse pleasure from that, without any regard to the harm they cause.

Another explanation for such habitual negativity is that the pessimist is afraid of failure. Therefore, they will do all they can to prevent themselves from ever being put into challenging situations. If a new project is being discussed, that insecure worker may see aspects of it that might put him under pressure later, or where he could potentially fail. He may then seek to prevent the proposal from ever going ahead by talking it down, presenting objections at the outset, and putting other people off it.

If the whole idea can be killed at birth, the negative person feels he has gained a measure of relief for himself personally and, in a perverted sense, he has. The problem is he has done so dishonestly, without ever stating his real underlying motives. He has also done it at the expense of others and of the firm as a whole. You cannot allow your own insecurities and personal 'hang ups' to influence you. In particular, they must not influence the advice you give to others, the input that you give to committees and teams, or the reports you write.

You have no right to undermine any of them for the sake of indulging your own inferiority complex. When assessing the likely difficulties that may be faced when seeking to implement a proposed idea or project, your attitude should be: "*How can I overcome each of these issues, so as to get this thing to work, even if it means more pressure for me?*" Your reaction should certainly not be "*How can I persuade others not to go ahead with this, so that I can avoid being put under pressure or having my weaknesses exposed?*"

Remember, *you* are not the issue. The firm is, and its clients or customers. Your duty is to help it to get things done, even if those things are difficult and even if they create stress or pressure for you personally. You have absolutely no right to prevent, delay or reduce the things that they need to do or to achieve for the sake of your own convenience, or to get an easier life. If you are tempted to think or act in this way then stop and challenge yourself, not only about the negativity and defeatism, but also the underlying selfishness which causes those features.

If you are facing a team meeting or committee in which someone else is proposing a novel way forward, or a solution to a complex problem, don't take any pleasure from thinking of reasons why his ideas can't work. Try instead to find reasons why they *can* work, and ways in which *you* can help them to

work. Then, others will begin to see that your comments provide added value and make their ideas even better and more likely to succeed.

After a while those creative types will begin to seek you out and will want you on their team because of what you add to it, rather than seeking to exclude you because of how you detract from it. Even if you can see genuine issues or potential snags that lie ahead, let your only motive for pointing those out be to help the business. It must never be done to shelter yourself from an increased workload or to put down the other person, whose bright idea it was.

If you must speak against the proposal, then try your best to think of viable alternatives that would work, or of solutions which would solve, or at least mitigate, the problems you are identifying. Also, look for potential opportunities that accompany the difficulty which you face, or that are hidden somewhere within it. It is amazing how often such positive benefits, openings, ideas and opportunities can be found *if you are looking for them*. Therefore, make it your policy to look for them. As our greatest Prime Minister of all time said:

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

Winston S. Churchill

A classic example of ‘can’t do thinking’ from the Bible is the account of the 12 spies whom Moses sent into Canaan to spy out the land in Numbers 13 and 14. Bear in mind that God had already *commanded* them to go into the land, and had also *promised* that they *would* receive it. Therefore, Moses’ purpose in sending in the 12 spies was not to decide *whether* to go in and take the land. The only question was *how best to go about it*. It was purely a reconnaissance mission, prior to going in.

I will only quote from parts of it, but you will see the dramatic contrast between the ‘*can do*’ approach taken by Joshua and Caleb and the ‘*can’t do*’ attitude of the other ten spies. You will also see, which may surprise some, how strongly God disapproved of the ten spies and their pessimism and defeatism. God was angry, not only at their cowardice and lack of faith, but also at the corrosive effect which their negative words had on the people as a whole. Here is where the story begins:

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel. From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a chief among them.”

Numbers 13:1-2 (ESV)

Moses then sets out the objectives of the fact-finding mission and he even tells them all to “*be of good courage*”. Therefore, they had no reason to be afraid:

¹⁷ Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, “Go up into the Negeb and go up into the hill country, ¹⁸ and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, ¹⁹ and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, ²⁰ and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land.” Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes.

Numbers 13:17-20 (ESV)

After 40 days all 12 spies return and give their reports to Moses and Aaron and to all the people of Israel. The negative ten go first. They speak positively of the land itself, but their focus then moves immediately to the *difficulties of taking it*, because of *how large the Canaanites are*. Their fear of the inhabitants of the land takes centre place in their report:

²⁵ At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. ²⁶ And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They

brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ And they told him, “We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan.”

Numbers 13:25-29 (ESV)

Then Caleb speaks, and note how totally different his attitude is. He reassures the people that the land *can still be taken* and that they are “*well able to overcome*”:

But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.”

Numbers 13:30 (ESV)

Even after hearing Caleb’s stirring words, the ten pessimists went straight back to trying to convince the people that it couldn’t be done, and that the Canaanites are “*stronger than we are*”. They even described themselves disparagingly as ‘*grasshoppers*’ in comparison to them:

³¹ Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.” ³² So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. ³³ And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”

Numbers 13:31-33 (ESV)

Note the debilitating effect which their negative, fearful words had on the people as a whole. Very quickly a mood of gloom and unbelief had spread like wildfire throughout the crowds. The people then began to grumble and to express their own fear and despair:

¹ Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. ² And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³ Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” ⁴ And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

Numbers 14:1-4 (ESV)

Joshua and Caleb tried again to win the people over and to persuade them that what God had commanded them to do *was possible* and that they *did not need to fear* the Canaanites. But by now the rot had set in too deeply and the people would not listen. Indeed, even hearing a positive message was now so irritating to them that they actually wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb:

⁶ And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, “The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. ⁸ If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. ⁹ Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.” ¹⁰ Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel.

Numbers 14:6-10 (ESV)

This whole episode made God very angry. Those ten negative spies had not been sent to work out *whether* to obey God's command to take the land, but only *how best to do so*. Their fear, gloom and unbelief spread like a contagious disease amongst the people. It meant that the entry into the land was delayed for 38 years, until that generation had died off and a new one had arisen. So, God punished that whole generation, i.e. all those who were over 20 years of age at the time of the Exodus:

²⁶ *And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,* ²⁷ *“How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me.”* ²⁸ *Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: ²⁹ your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, ³⁰ not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. ³¹ But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. ³² But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. ³³ And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness.*

Numbers 14:26-33 (ESV)

However, God punished the ten negative ‘*can't do*’ spies even more severely, because of the unhealthy influence they had had on the people. Rather than merely letting them die off one by one in the wilderness, over the next four decades, God wiped all ten of them out straightaway with a plague:

³⁶ *And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing up a bad report about the land—³⁷ the men who brought up a bad report of the land—died by plague before the LORD. ³⁸ Of those men who went to spy out the land, only Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive.*

Numbers 14:36-38 (ESV)

Fault 24 – Being unwilling ever to say no to clients, colleagues or bosses, or to give them any bad news, or warn of problems ahead

We have just looked at people who are always saying no, or at least thinking negatively, and therefore obstructing those around them. Now we are looking at the other end of the spectrum. That is those who *won't ever say no* and who aren't willing to give *any bad news, or warnings*, or to tell the *frank truth* to clients, colleagues or bosses, even when it is appropriate to do so. The most obvious examples of this that spring to mind are some of my former legal colleagues and, later on, my staff, many of whom were reluctant to be straightforward with clients.

They did not want to give them bad news about their cases, or tell the client that he was in the wrong, and that his opponent was right, or that his expectations for damages were unrealistic. Such staff were cowards. They were afraid of getting an angry reaction from the client, or of being told off or blamed, especially if they had previously given different advice. That is they were too cowardly to say that they had changed their minds, or been wrong, or even that the facts had changed.

Instead of telling the frank truth, their way of dealing with their fear was to cower away and say nothing, at least for the time being, always putting off the evil day to some unspecified later point, which often never came. My own approach was very different. I obviously took no pleasure from clients being disappointed, irritated or angry. But I knew that if bad news needed to be given, or if the hard truth had to be told, or if the client's hopes needed to be dashed, then it is best to do it at the *earliest possible time*.

Also, as unpleasant and embarrassing as it may be, if you are telling the client that your previous advice no longer applies, or even that you now realise that it was wrong, you must tell them. *And you must do it today*. The longer you put it off, the worse it will get. You would only be making a rod for your own

back by delaying. Therefore, even though you know the client will be shocked and even angry at the news, perhaps displaying 10 ‘units’ of anger, that reaction will only get worse the longer you put off telling him.

So you are probably swapping 10 units of anger now for 50 or 100 units of anger next month, or next year, if you delay telling him. I am simply stating the downright obvious. There is no conceivable basis for disagreeing with the policy of being frank, and of grasping the nettle at the earliest possible time. However, even though it is obviously the right approach, it is not what multitudes of workers actually do. They prefer to hide from the client, and even pretend to be out of the office, in order to avoid a difficult conversation.

Or they might take his calls, but say nothing as yet about the bad news, or the adverse development in his case, or the diminished prospects for success. Sometimes even my bosses were too scared to give bad news, when I was an employee, and they would ask me to give it on their behalf. In one sense that wasn’t a bad idea, if they were too cowardly to do it, as the alternative was for them to do nothing at all, which would be far worse. I never found it easy to give bad news, and I certainly never enjoyed it, but I knew I had to do it. Therefore, I got on and did it.

I just braced myself and rang the client, or got him to come in to see me. Then I told him straight. Strangely, in all the years I practiced law, nobody ever lost their temper with me. Though shocked or disappointed, they could see that I was telling them the truth and that it was for their benefit to hear the bad news. They probably also knew, from doing their own jobs, how difficult it is to do what I did. In all my years in practice, I never received a complaint from any client for giving bad news, or for telling them their case was weak, or even for saying that it should be abandoned.

This need for frankness and courage does not only apply when giving ‘bad news’. It also applies in your general dealings with clients and customers when they are asking you how long something will take, or the prospects for success, or what it will cost, and so on. Even before anything has gone wrong, many staff feel a temptation to try to ‘please’ the client by giving him an optimistic estimate of the delivery time, or the likely cost. They do so because they want him to be happy with them *today*.

The problem is that although the client may be happy with you today, he is not going to be happy three months later, or six months later, when the case/project/production process etc is not as far ahead as you had promised, and when costs are already larger than you had estimated. The best policy, therefore, is to try to “*under-promise and over-deliver*”. That involves a trade-off, but it is a worthwhile one. It means that today, when you give the client your conservative, even slightly gloomy, estimates and predictions, nobody will be patting you on the back or praising you.

However, it also means that several months later nobody will be shouting at you for getting the estimates wrong. What is more, if you are able to deliver ahead of schedule, and for a lower cost than you projected, then they will be delighted with you. It boils down to whether you want the pleasure of approval at the beginning or at the end. Based on over 30 years of experience, I absolutely recommend that you always choose to receive it at the end. That is what clients are most likely to remember, and what lasts longest, and it is also what will bring them back to you with repeat business.

Fault 25 - Being unable to consider tasks simultaneously, but only sequentially. Also, being unable to think laterally, anticipate problems, and ask questions which are not on a single ‘train line’

One weakness which I tried to iron out of my staff was the entrenched habit of thinking about issues *sequentially, rather than simultaneously*. If you are running a case or handling a project, there are likely to be several issues arising, tasks to be performed, tests to be carried out, or enquiries to be made. Why would any sensible, efficient person choose to consider or implement each of those *one by one*, such that they only start to look at the second issue after they have completed, or found the answer to, the first? Most of the time there is no need for that step by step approach.

It is entirely possible to be pressing ahead on several different fronts, all at the same time. If you go about it that way far less time is wasted on the gaps in between the tasks/issues/enquiries. I used the analogy with my staff of how they might go about making a British Sunday lunch of roast beef, roast potatoes, mashed potatoes, various vegetables, Yorkshire pudding, gravy etc. It would be absurd to make that lunch *one item at a time*, such that you only put the roast potatoes in the oven after the beef is fully roasted, and then only put the vegetables in to steam after the potatoes are mashed.

No right-thinking person would ever do that. You would coordinate each of the component elements of the overall task so that they were all running in parallel and eventually *cooking simultaneously*. Then they will be ready all at the same time, not one after the other. The analogy may sound exaggerated, but that is what many people do every day in their jobs. When I called employees in to see me about one of their cases, they would often tell me they are “*making enquiry X*”. However, they would not say *what else* they thought they should *also* be doing at the moment.

I would then ask about that and they would say that when they get the answer to enquiry X, they then propose to make enquiry Y. When asked what they will do when they get the answer to that, they would say that they will then make enquiry Z. I would then say: “*Why not make enquiries X, Y and Z all at the same time, right now? Then, when you get all the answers back, you will be able, straight away, to make a substantive decision. Or you will be able to progress the case in some other way, without wasting any time.*”

Their inability to think on more than one plane at a time, or to think ahead at all, was so entrenched that I drafted a lengthy document called a ‘*Case Plan*’. It was designed to help staff to think more laterally, but also to enable them to interrogate and supervise themselves. My aim was also to help them to ensure that as many tasks or enquiries as possible were attended to simultaneously, and/or at the earliest possible stage in the case. That approach is far better than crawling along, step by step, with a lengthy time delay between every action you take.

I also referred to their approach as “*train line thinking*” because people think in one straight line, like a railway track, with ‘stations’ along the way, where they expect to do things, but with nothing in between, and no way of getting off that one track. Please refer to the Appendix for a blank copy of a case plan for a personal injury litigation file. The general approach that it takes may be adapted to make it relevant to any kind of situation, not just litigation. At least it illustrates the kind of probing, analytical, multi-lateral approach that I am advocating.

The staff would look at that case plan on screen and fill it in for themselves and the boxes would expand for their answers to be inserted. I hoped to be able to re-programme the staff not only to think laterally, but also to address issues simultaneously and to reduce the need for them to receive input and guidance from me. Not everyone is a born lateral-thinker, but the skill can be developed, at least to some degree. In particular, anybody can at least learn to plan ahead, anticipate issues, question themselves, and assemble a list of tasks and enquiries, even if they are not naturally gifted as a planner.

Moreover, it is possible to do much of it now, *all at once*, rather than let the steps that you need to take emerge one by one, over many weeks or months, like a slowly dripping tap. It is not only the legal profession which is plagued by this habit of ‘sequential thinking’, as if along a single train line, with long gaps of inactivity in between. If you go to see a doctor, at least in the UK, he too is likely to deal with you one step at a time and no more. Thus, he might send you to the nurse or hospital for test X, but he will not even consider, let alone request, tests Y or Z until after he has had the result from test X.

In this way patients in the UK can take months even to be diagnosed, let alone treated. That needless delay is partly because of this ‘*one step at a time*’ mentality, which is so deeply ingrained in many doctors. Of course, another reason for their approach is lack of finance. Their policy guidelines often tell them to do tests one by one, not all together, in case some of the tests might later prove to have been

unnecessary. So it is not always, or entirely, that individual doctor's fault. In some cases it is a fault of the system.

However, much of the time, that is not the reason, as it can also be due to lazy, sloppy thinking by the individual doctor, who has no imagination and no sense of urgency. Therefore, he thinks of just one thing to do and sends the patient off to try that, rather than think ahead more intelligently, and laterally. Instead, he could ask himself: "*What else could I be doing, checking or asking for right now, alongside that first step, so as to consider other possibilities, speed up the diagnosis, and get the right treatment started at the earliest point?*"

Try hard to eliminate these bad mental habits from your own way of approaching clients, projects or problems. Recalibrate yourself to think as you ought to, even if it doesn't come naturally to you, and even if those around you don't do likewise. If necessary, choose to be the only one in your firm who takes this lateral-thinking approach, with several 'saucepans' on the hob, all at the same time.

Fault 26 – Reluctance to 'take ownership' of tasks and also seeking to fob off clients or colleagues so as to avoid work

Anyone who has ever been in a hospital, or who has had to ring a large organisation such as an insurance company or government department will have experienced this problem. There are a great many staff whose first instinct when they receive a request for help, or a telephone call from a customer, or even from a colleague, is to try to fob them off with some excuse. Or they will tell them they need to see someone else, or ring someone else. Their aim is not to help that client or colleague, but only to get rid of them, so that they personally don't have to deal with his problem.

Therefore, they send the caller elsewhere, and give him "*the run-around*", rather than willingly taking responsibility for the task. Often that worker would be perfectly capable of handling it, and they are the right person, or at least *a* right person to speak to. But they will tell you that you need someone else because they simply cannot be bothered with you and don't want to be 'lumbered' with your case. The same issue arises when bosses want to get things done and are looking for volunteers.

Staff will begin to run for cover because they don't want to be given the new or additional duty. They keep their heads down, speak of how busy they are, and try to avoid being asked to help with the problem that has arisen. They see it as valid to defend themselves from being "*put upon*" or "*taken advantage of*" by others and to make sure that they do not get more than their fair share of the tasks. Of course, a person can be so over-burdened that it is impossible, or at least inadvisable, for them to take on any more.

However, in such cases, the right approach is to be open with managers, to *say* that you have too much on and to ask to be given a period of respite. That is entirely appropriate, *if that is genuinely your situation*. However, what is not appropriate is for that employee, even if they are genuinely over-burdened, to seek to solve their own problem by giving clients and colleagues the run-around and fobbing them off to find help elsewhere. That displays not only dishonesty, but also a lack of concern for the needs of the client, or the business, and it amounts to putting your own needs ahead of theirs.

Moreover, it is all the more blameworthy because it is not done openly, but covertly, so that the client is deceived into thinking he needs to be ringing someone else. Even if you are over-burdened, it is not that caller's fault and it is not right to make him pay the price of you solving your own problem, whether real or otherwise, of being over-worked. On the whole, however, I question whether it is real because it is generally the *busiest* staff who will volunteer to help in an emergency and who will always take a phone call. It is the staff with the lowest caseloads, who are most prone to dodging responsibility.

So, they might claim to be over-worked, but the reality is usually that it is their colleagues who are actually over-worked, due in part to the reluctance of the lazy staff to take ownership of problems or

accept their fair share of tasks. If you do take this selfish and dishonest approach, then good managers will eventually notice. Then you will pay the price for your attitude, as you will find that you are not promoted or given the pay rises that the more willing staff get.

In my law firm there were no set salaries or rigid grades. I paid every individual employee exactly what I thought *they* deserved, based on their own skill, attitude, character and work rate. Therefore, they were all on very different pay levels, even if they had the same length of service. Not every manager takes that approach, but the better ones do. Therefore, you will gain more, in the long term, by being enthusiastic and willing than by dodging responsibilities.

Fault 27 - Seeking to make themselves indispensable, but in the wrong way, by selfishly refusing to share their own knowledge, skills or experience with other staff

If you work within a business for any length of time you are likely to develop certain areas of skill, knowledge or experience which other staff do not have. It may relate to any number of things, such as IT or other technical know-how, internal office procedures, or even something as basic as where things are stored or filed. The issue is what you should do when you have such skills or knowledge, especially if the management are asking you to show others what you know.

They may ask you to do that for efficiency reasons, to increase the number of staff who can assist in that area, so that they are not so heavily reliant upon you. I have come across this issue and have seen staff handle it both well and badly. Two employees spring to mind particularly for the selfish way in which they responded to requests to train others and to share their knowledge. In each case, they delayed, gave a variety of excuses, and were reluctant and obstructive. Eventually I gave up and took other steps to provide the training, because I knew they would not give it.

They knew they were the only person in my law firm who knew how to do tasks ‘X’ and ‘Y’ respectively. They were also determined to keep it that way, even in defiance of my explicit instructions. They never actually said “*No!*” out loud. They simply dragged their feet endlessly, came up with all sorts of implausible excuses, and never got around to giving anybody the training. When any person was sent to them to be shown how to do it, they fobbed them off, invented reasons for delay, and made sure they were never shown.

Their motive in refusing to give the training was that they considered they had a valuable skill. That skill was made all the more valuable *to them personally* by its uniqueness in our firm. So they felt it gave them ‘*leverage*’ and that they could expect to obtain better pay and conditions, and more job security, if they remained the only person in the firm with that particular knowledge/skill. In both cases it backfired for them. I saw what they were doing and how they were defying me, and harming the interests of the business, solely to further their own interests.

That cold, calculating selfishness appalled me. I also saw it as an act of disloyalty both to me personally and to the firm as a whole. So, when the opportunity arose, I got rid of one of them and let the other go, without making any attempt to persuade her to stay. Nobody is ever indispensable especially if they try to go about things in that devious way. The right approach, if you want to make yourself indispensable, is to do the *exact opposite*. Share your knowledge and train others enthusiastically. In fact, volunteer to do so.

Help to build up the overall strength and quality of the firm by enabling as many as possible of the staff to know what you know and to improve their performance by learning from you. An employee who takes that approach is truly rare. They would probably be the only one in most firms, because the norm is to share nothing. If you operate as I recommend, you are actually more likely, in the longer term, to find favour with management, and gain advancement, especially if it is a well-run business, than if you pursue the usual selfish approach.

Even if the company doesn't appreciate or reward you, and even if they don't keep you on as an employee, you have still lost nothing by sharing your knowledge freely. That healthy, unselfish attitude will steadily seep into all other aspects of your work. That will eventually make you into the kind of person who will inevitably succeed, even if you have to go elsewhere, because of the effect it has on your overall character and approach to work. Therefore, you will certainly get your reward in your next job, even if you don't get it in your current workplace.

Fault 28 – Inability to keep their mouth shut and to maintain confidentiality about private or sensitive information

In most workplaces gossip is rife. The staff, and even bosses, give in to the temptation to reveal private information about the firm, colleagues or other sensitive matters. There is something that our sinful nature finds delicious in the giving and receiving of confidential information. The very fact that it is forbidden gives it much of its appeal.

*The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;
they go down into the inner parts of the body.*

Proverbs 26:22 (ESV)

So the temptation is strong, and most of us are affected by it, but it is very unhealthy. If you want to be trusted enough to be promoted, you will have to learn how to control your tongue, avoid gossip, and keep things confidential. For many that is harder than keeping a box of chocolates on their desk and never touching them. But if you are determined to be the kind of employee God wants you to be, then resolve to do whatever is necessary to overcome the craving to divulge secrets. If you force yourself to do this you will have far less trouble, and so will the company you work for:

*For lack of wood the fire goes out,
and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.*

Proverbs 26:20 (ESV)

The amount of private and confidential information that comes your way will increase steadily as you rise in rank. Thus, every promotion adds to the problem in one sense. However, you are not likely to be promoted, or at least not to be promoted again and again, if those above you can see that you are a gossip and have no control of your mouth. At best, they will promote you no further. At worst, they may even demote or dismiss you. Most likely of all, they will simply make sure you are kept away from all sensitive or potentially damaging information. They will have to, for the sake of the business.

That one fault therefore has the potential to hold back your entire career. That is how serious it is. Senior managers need people they can trust and keeping secrets is one of the main ways in which such trust needs to be demonstrated. Therefore, be very strict with yourself from now on. If you know something confidential, then remind yourself that that is exactly what it is. Put it away in a separate compartment in your mind so that it can never be discussed, except with those who are authorised to hear it.

People who love gossip get a sense of importance from being able to share private information with colleagues. It makes them the centre of attention, with a group of eager listeners gathered round them in the canteen, or in a series of one to one conversations. If you are to overcome this compulsion to gossip, you must get control of your pride and also tackle any issues of insecurity, or any inferiority complex, that you may have. Be willing to be seen as someone who has no gossip to offer, or even as someone who knows nothing anyway.

That in itself is hard for many because, if you don't gossip, many colleagues will mistakenly assume that you are not important enough to have been told anything. It won't often occur to them that you do know, but simply aren't saying. Nevertheless, brace yourself and accept that some people will

misunderstand and think you are unimportant. Don't seek to get your sense of worth in that way in the first place. Get it from being excellent at your job, and from being 100% trustworthy, not from holding forth at the water fountain about the secrets that you find out about in meetings or from typing your boss's letters.

Fault 29 – Allowing success or promotion to go to their head and becoming proud, bossy and intolerable to work with

I have known many people who did well at their jobs, and worked hard, such that they were promoted, only for it to go to their heads. Ironically, it can then become impossible to promote them any further, or even to let them remain in that new role, because of how they change. They can become proud and bossy and start pushing their weight around with those who used to be their colleagues. It is very sad, because it is such an unnecessary bar to further advancement in their careers. Yet it is most certainly a bar, because a wise manager will not allow such people to occupy higher positions.

Therefore, if you ever get a promotion, don't let it go to your head. Don't let it puff you up with haughtiness or self-importance and don't use that new role to show others that you now have power and authority. Those things are given to you to be used, in the right ways, and for the right reasons, not to give you an ego-trip or for you to take pleasure from them. Therefore, if you are given a promotion, or responsibility for some team, project or resource, make a conscious effort to humble yourself. In particular, avoid preening yourself, or showing off, or even the appearance of those things.

That too is important, because those around you may be acutely sensitive, and may be expecting you to become boastful. If so, they are all the more likely to misinterpret your actions and words unless you take care to go very clearly in the opposite direction. A prime example of how a person can change for the worse when promoted is a lawyer I once knew, whom I'll call '*Kelvin*'. He was the junior salaried partner in his law firm when I was in that same role in my then firm. We both later went on to set up our own law firms, which we each wholly owned.

He did extremely well and I came across him a few years later, after he had achieved a lot of success. The transformation was appalling. I attended a meeting he chaired which involved lawyers from various law firms who were all on a panel, plus some of Kelvin's own staff. He was insufferably arrogant in his manner, and he deliberately humiliated one of his own staff in front of us. It was painful to witness. Yet Kelvin had been insignificant, and even geeky, when he had been in a junior position in his previous firm. Indeed, that fact may explain some of his insecurity.

From that, he changed into a pompous, boastful bully who pushed his weight around. He is, admittedly, at the top end of the haughtiness spectrum but, even amongst junior staff, the same kind of pride can be seen. I am thinking of a shop assistant, whom I will call '*Daisy*'. I was told about her by someone who worked alongside her. All that happened to Daisy was that she was made a key-holder for the shop. That simply meant she became one of the people who was responsible for opening up in the morning and locking up at night. It wasn't really even a 'promotion' at all, just an added duty.

Yet, when that key was given to Daisy, she was utterly transformed by it. She began to take on airs and graces and to talk down to her colleagues, as if she was in charge of them, which she wasn't. Unsurprisingly, that change of attitude annoyed everyone. In the end, the company sacked her because she developed such delusions of grandeur she became intolerable. So it isn't usually the people who rise from colonel to brigadier who are likely to become proud. If anything, they are less prone to it, because they have already had a number of promotions and have learned how to handle it.

The main problem is when lowly staff receive their first promotion or supervisory responsibility. They are the ones whose heads are most likely to be turned by it and to swell up. So, a lance corporal is more likely to lord it over a private than a brigadier is over a colonel. Therefore, try very hard not to take on any airs or graces if you do get a promotion, or if you achieve success in some other way and begin to

be noticed. Try to treat others as you always did. Above all, don't talk down to anybody, or even seem to do so.

That said, at the same time, there is also a need to be willing to move up into your new role and to have the confidence to exert your new authority. But that should only be done in appropriate ways, and when the circumstances require it, not proudly or imperiously. Nevertheless, if you weren't willing to assert your authority at all, for fear of being considered haughty, you would fail in your first duty at that new level. That is that you should actually do the job that you have been appointed to. At times, that has to involve using the new authority that you have been given.

Therefore, making clear decisions, exercising authority, and giving orders, even publicly, are not in themselves manifestations of pride. It entirely depends on the *manner* in which you go about it and the *heart attitude* you display while doing so. Therefore, be confident and decisive, but give your orders politely, modestly and with proper regard to the feelings of your former colleagues. Their feathers may already have been ruffled by your promotion. So, if you want to be given another promotion later, take care not to ruffle their feathers any further by your insensitivity now.

Fault 30 – Procrastination and “allowing the best to become the enemy of the good”

Procrastination, or putting tasks off until later, is not only a problem in the workplace, but wherever in life it arises, and it needs to be fought against. It mainly occurs when the task is difficult, dirty, dangerous or dull, such that the worker doesn't feel like tackling it just now. He prefers to leave it for another day, when he will be “*less busy*” or “*in a better mood*” or when he “*has more information*”. Of course, it is not possible to do everything today. Some things have to be put off, through no fault of yours.

Some tasks even benefit from delay, if the reasons for it are valid, and if that delay is not too long. However, on the whole, the excuses that people make for delay are not valid and it would have been far better to tackle the task earlier, ideally on day one. A common excuse is that by leaving the task until later we will be able to “*make a better job of it*”. We can tell ourselves that we will then be able to write a really good report, or give an excellent presentation, or draft a much more impressive Defence and Counterclaim. However, that is usually an illusion. In fact it is self-delusion.

It is referred to as “*making the best the enemy of the good*” because, in the forlorn hope of doing the very *best* work later on, you end up not doing the *good* work which you could have done at the outset. Very often, the reality is that the task only gets done at the last minute anyway, and in a rushed manner, just before the deferred deadline. If so, even less time is actually given to doing it in the end, not more. Ironically, the quality of work done is then lower, not higher, than if it had been done days, weeks, or even months earlier, when you first began putting it off.

There will, admittedly, be certain times where leaving it until later might produce a better outcome or product, but it will rarely be any more than a marginal improvement. Moreover, it will come at a high price in terms of delay to the client and also the stress that you experience in having that client, and your boss, chasing you for it. Therefore, far from being restful, the period of delay may exhaust and demoralise you, which is in stark contrast to the elation one feels from getting a job done early, and then being able to relax.

I first learned that lesson when I was 10 years old. Our class teacher used to set us a piece of homework every Friday which had to be written over the weekend and handed in on the Monday. It was usually a piece of creative writing. I would often leave it un-started all weekend, while I went out to play or watched TV. Then I finally had to do it on the Sunday evening, when it was not possible to put it off any longer. I still remember how that grim prospect got me down. The essay hung in the air like a dark cloud throughout the weekend.

Then, one particular Friday afternoon, I somehow took the notion to sit down and write the story there and then, as soon as I got home. An hour or so later, having done it, and with the whole weekend still ahead of me, I felt a surge of exhilaration. I have never forgotten that moment. That was the best weekend ever and I had a spring in my step the whole time, knowing that the homework had already been done and was not hanging over me.

Fault 31 – Complaining and moaning, especially where it is done to other staff, because it is corrosive to morale and highly contagious

Controlling our tongue is a major job. It is not only a matter of avoiding lying, gossiping, swearing, cursing and arguing. We also need to avoid *complaining*, which is yet another of those sins which people don't consider to be a sin. Many view moaning as a harmless activity, or at least as not being a sin. However, the truth is it is both sinful and harmful. Indeed, it is actually one of the most damaging things you can do, not only in the workplace, but anywhere, because of the knock-on effects which complaining has, both on you and others, as follows:

- a) It alters the way you see your job, your boss, your firm and your customers/clients. The more you moan about them, the darker and greyer will be the *lens* that is over your eyes, through which you see the world. You will eventually train yourself only to be able to see half empty glasses instead of half full ones, only difficulties instead of opportunities, and only things to resent, rather than to give thanks for.
- b) It alters the way in which other people, especially bosses, see you. Instead of considering you for promotion, they will increasingly see you as a liability, and even a menace, and with good reason.
- c) It alters the way your colleagues see the firm, its customers, their own bosses, and also their fellow workers. They will become contaminated by your negativity, ingratitude, resentment and bitterness. This has a remarkably corrosive effect on them and is also highly contagious. So a negative employee can quickly cause a whole team to become resentful and to start complaining themselves. This then lowers the morale and efficiency of the business as a whole, as well as harming those colleagues and holding them back in their careers.

It is not just my idea that complaining is harmful, and also a sin. That is how God sees it, which is why He objects to it so strongly. Consider how God responded to the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness and how severely He punished them for it:

²² Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴ And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

Exodus 15:22-24 (ESV)

¹ All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

Exodus 17:1-3 (ESV)

¹ And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. ² Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the

LORD, and the fire died down. ³ So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the LORD burned among them.

Numbers 11:1-3 (ESV)

Perhaps the hardest task is to recognise that you are complaining *while you are doing it*. To be able to do that, you firstly need to become able to see it for what it is and also to accept that it is wrong, rather than justify it to yourself. Having seen all that, you can then start the process of rooting it out of your thinking and, above all, out of your speech. When there are difficulties or disappointments at work, or where the management's decisions and/or the working conditions, are not as you would wish, force yourself to close your mouth.

Then don't say anything at all about it. Even if what you were planning to say was 100% true, it is still a complaint. Indeed, the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness were often entirely *accurate*. God never said they were *lying*, but only that they were *complaining*. Therefore, they really were thirsty. There really was no water. There really were no cucumbers, and no onions or garlic either. But that didn't stop God being angry when they complained about those facts.

So, don't tell yourself that it is alright to say a thing as long as it is true. It isn't if it amounts to complaining, especially if that complaint is about your job, your firm or those who manage you. Therefore, get an 'off switch' fitted to your mouth, so that you can stop yourself from even starting to complain. Or, if you have begun to do so, then learn how to stop yourself, in mid-sentence. Train yourself instead to think and speak of good things, which you appreciate, and for which you can give thanks.

If you think that your job is so bad that you would have to search for such things, then go ahead and search. The fact that they aren't obvious to you does not mean that there are no such things. It simply means that *you* have become so negative that you no longer recognise them, even when they are right in front of you. So start to cultivate the habit of giving thanks. Do so privately, to yourself, but also in your prayers. Here are a few examples of things about your job which you could appreciate, and for which you could thank God:

- a) that you have a job at all – many people don't
- b) that you get paid, at whatever salary level or hourly rate you are on. You can be sure that there are vast numbers of others, at least in foreign countries, who get less.
- c) that the difficulties or hard tasks which you currently face will enable you to learn, improve, and gain experience
- d) that you have some good bosses or colleagues, from whom you can learn how to do things
- e) that you have some bad bosses or colleagues, from whom you can learn how *not* to do things

If I knew the exact terms and conditions of your job I am confident that I could make a far longer list of good things, that you could give thanks for. So could you, if you looked at them correctly, with the right attitude, in the way God wants you to, and not as a complainer. Try it. Look at your contract. Look also at your working day, your hours, your conditions, your bosses and colleagues. Begin to identify, and to list, all the good things that others, who do not have your job, don't have and which you would not have either if you did not work there.

That is not to say that there are no bad things about your job, and no bad people in your workplace. How could there not be any? If your job was 100% perfect in every way, what scope would there be for you to learn, or grow, or to make discoveries about your own faults? If you practise this policy of giving thanks on an ongoing basis you will be amazed, even after a few weeks, at how much better everything seems. Nothing may actually have changed, but the way that you *see everything* will certainly be very different, and that is vitally important.

All 31 faults set out in one convenient, abbreviated list

Each of these common faults on the part of employees need to be reflected on separately and considered carefully one by one. However, it will also help to see the broader picture if I set them all out together in one list, with just the headings. Why not photograph this list and keep it on your phone, so that you can look at it from time to time and reflect on each of the points?

1. Laziness
2. Low standards and lack of attention to detail
3. Unfaithfulness to bosses, clients and colleagues
4. Not truly caring about their work or the fate of their client, patient or customer to the point where it really matters to them
5. Dishonesty
6. Unreliability
7. Not seeing themselves as a servant and having no real understanding of the concept of service
8. Reluctance to endure any difficulty, hardship or pressure at work and seeking excessively to avoid these, irrespective of the effect on others
9. Unwillingness to be open about mistakes, or to admit that they don't know things, or to ask questions, especially in front of others
10. Failing to give honour to their bosses and even directly dishonouring them
11. Lack of interest, self-motivation and enthusiasm
12. Being content to settle for mediocrity rather than seeking to become the very best they can possibly be in terms of skill, knowledge and experience
13. Lack of initiative or inventiveness and giving no thought to how the systems and procedures of their job could be altered or improved
14. Unwillingness to be corrected, criticised or rebuked, even when it is done constructively, and resenting, or even hating, any boss who seeks to do so
15. Being discontented with their wages, hours, terms and working conditions and feeling envious and resentful about what others have, or earn, or are allowed to do
16. Unfaithfulness to colleagues, such that they let others down, fail to pull their weight and even engage in gossip
17. Automatically assuming themselves to be in the right and to be the most important person in the room
18. Being unable to see themselves as they really are, and as others see them, but only as they imagine themselves to be
19. Having no understanding of duty or responsibility and thinking exclusively in terms of rights and entitlements

20. Cowardice - mainly morally, but also physically
21. Unwillingness to start at the bottom
22. Unwillingness to take extra work home voluntarily, or to work late, or to do anything outside of their stated contractual terms
23. Being a negative, defeatist 'can't do person' who can only see obstacles, and reasons why things cannot be done, rather than advantages, solutions and possible ways forward
24. Being unwilling ever to say no to clients, colleagues or bosses, or to give them any bad news, or warn of problems ahead
25. Being unable to consider tasks simultaneously, but only sequentially. Also being unable to think laterally, anticipate problems, or ask questions which are not on a single 'train line'
26. Reluctance to take ownership of tasks and seeking to fob off clients or colleagues when they call, so as to avoid work
27. Seeking to make themselves indispensable, but in the wrong way, by selfishly refusing to share their own knowledge, skills or experience with other staff
28. Inability to keep their mouth shut and to maintain confidentiality about private or sensitive information
29. Allowing success or promotion to go to their head and becoming proud, bossy and intolerable to work with
30. Procrastination and also "allowing the best to become the enemy of the good"

Complaining and moaning, especially where it is done to other staff, because it is corrosive to morale and highly contagious